

Copyright  
by  
Kenneth Merrill Miller  
2017

The Dissertation Committee for Kenneth Merrill Miller  
certifies that this is the approved version of the following dissertation:

## **The Division of Labor in Congressional Campaigns**

Committee:

---

Daron R. Shaw, Supervisor

---

Stephen D. Ansolabehere

---

Tasha S. Philpot

---

Brian E. Roberts

---

Christopher Wlezien

# **The Division of Labor in Congressional Campaigns**

by

**Kenneth Merrill Miller**

## **DISSERTATION**

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

The University of Texas at Austin

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements

for the Degree of

## **DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN

August 2017

*for Erin*

## Acknowledgments

My graduate training was guided mainly by Daron Shaw and Tasha Philpot. Throughout his six years as my advisor, Daron Shaw has encouraged me to think bigger with my work. My instincts often draw me to curious realities that first seem like inside baseball types of questions. From Daron Shaw I have learned how to take little curiosities and turn them into larger and more important questions about politics. Tasha Philpot has been my mentor. Over the past six years she has guided me through the professional landscape of academia with unvarnished advice, provided support and research opportunities via the political communication laboratory, and taught me how to be a college instructor.

All of the other members of the committee have made important contributions to this work. The initial seed of this dissertation came from Brian Roberts' Money in U.S. Politics seminar. He was the first to nudge this project towards the more ambitious and more interesting work it is today. Chris Wlezien has enthusiastically assisted me with detailed and rapid feedback. Stephen Ansolabehere's inclusion on this committee has been a gift. He is one of very few scholars with work that touches on nearly all areas of this project. I have been grateful for his thoughts on my work. Although he was not on the dissertation committee, I am also grateful for Robert Luskin's mentorship. I applied to the graduate program at Texas because of Bob, and more than any other professor he has made me both a better writer and a clearer thinker.

My wife Erin Grady deserves praise beyond the dedication of this dissertation. She supported her husband of 7 years moving 1,370 miles away for the next 6 years to attend graduate school when he was just starting a perfectly good job in Northeast Ohio. Her career has blossomed but she has still been willing to tolerate this academic pursuit that will probably put me into a new, unknown location where we may not be able to reunite for yet another year or longer. Even within the world of academia where long distance relationships and personal sacrifices are fairly common, this has been an unreasonable burden on Erin.

Despite separation from my wife and dachshund, graduate school at Texas has been the best time of my life (and that says a lot: I was in a touring rock band for 15 years). As much as the degree I have earned, I value the friendships I have formed. I had lucky timing to enter graduate school with a cohort that included Jake Dizard, Calla Hummel, Katie Putnam, Ahmed Siddiqi, and Joe Tafoya. In particular, Kim Guiler has been my dearest friend and closest work companion at Texas. Numerous other graduate students both ahead and behind me, especially Caitlin Andrews, Julie Philips, Ben Rondou, Megan Thomas, and Matt Vandenbroek made my work better and helped me take full advantage of the bars, coffee shops, music clubs, and barbecue of Austin. Thanks to them, it was a wonderful six years.

# The Division of Labor in Congressional Campaigns

Publication No. \_\_\_\_\_

Kenneth Merrill Miller, Ph.D.  
The University of Texas at Austin, 2017

Supervisor: Daron R. Shaw

This dissertation explains how candidates, parties, and independent groups have adjusted to the post-*Citizens United* campaign environment by dividing the labor of campaign communications. Using an original dataset of spending in Senate campaigns and data on advertising content in congressional campaigns merged with television ratings data, this project demonstrates that most campaign actors will harmonize their efforts through compensatory cooperative activity to benefit from each others' advantages and compensate for each others' constraints. The quality of this cooperation is not always uniform however, and sometimes varies based on the objectives of the campaign actors. The degree and complexity of cooperation suggests that the parties have reasserted control in a new system of network-based campaigning that is displacing the candidate-centered campaigns that characterized U.S. elections for the past several decades. This new system has significant effects on democratic discourse, resulting in advertising that advances more nationalized issue agendas, and campaigns that are more attack-oriented but with attacks that are more informative for voters.

# Table of Contents

<b>Acknowledgments</b>	<b>v</b>
<b>Abstract</b>	<b>vii</b>
<b>List of Tables</b>	<b>x</b>
<b>List of Figures</b>	<b>xi</b>
<b>Chapter 1. Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Chapter 2. Theory of Cooperative Campaigning</b>	<b>7</b>
2.1 Federal Campaign Rules . . . . .	10
2.2 Campaign Actors . . . . .	13
2.3 The Expanding Role of Outside Groups . . . . .	17
2.4 Theory and Hypotheses . . . . .	20
2.5 Summary . . . . .	37
<b>Chapter 3. Cooperative Media Spending in Senate Elections</b>	<b>39</b>
3.1 Allocation Priorities of Actors . . . . .	40
3.2 Data . . . . .	42
3.3 Analysis . . . . .	47
3.4 Conclusion . . . . .	59
<b>Chapter 4. Compensatory Attack in Congressional Campaigns</b>	<b>62</b>
4.1 The Risk and Reward of Attack Advertising . . . . .	63
4.2 Hypotheses . . . . .	65
4.3 Data and Measurement . . . . .	69
4.4 Analyses . . . . .	74
4.5 Conclusion . . . . .	89



<b>Chapter 5. Cooperative Campaigning and Issue Agendas</b>	<b>92</b>
5.1 Issue Agendas in Campaigns . . . . .	92
5.2 Hypotheses . . . . .	97
5.3 Data . . . . .	99
5.4 Analyses . . . . .	103
5.5 Conclusion . . . . .	115
<b>Chapter 6. Conclusion</b>	<b>118</b>
6.1 Summarizing Cooperation in Campaigns . . . . .	118
6.2 The Consequences of Cooperation in Campaigns . . . . .	120
6.3 The Near-Term Future of Cooperation . . . . .	122
<b>Appendices</b>	<b>125</b>
<b>Appendix A. Measurement of Variables</b>	<b>126</b>
<b>Appendix B. Additional Models and Robustness Checks</b>	<b>133</b>
<b>Bibliography</b>	<b>141</b>
<b>Vita</b>	<b>155</b>

## List of Tables

2.1	Objectives of Campaign Actors . . . . .	21
3.1	Media Spending in Senate Campaigns, 2010–2014 . . . . .	44
3.2	Correlations of Media Spending with Competition . . . . .	45
3.3	Summary Statistics for Model of Outside Spending . . . . .	48
3.4	Tobit Models of Outside Media Spending, Senate 2010–2014 . . . . .	52
3.5	Outside Media Spending by Group Type, 2010–2014 . . . . .	57
4.1	Percentage of Advertising Attacking Opponents . . . . .	72
4.2	Advertising Volume by Competitiveness . . . . .	73
4.3	Summary Statistics for Models of Attack Percentage . . . . .	75
4.4	Fractional Logit Models of Candidate Attack Percentage . . . . .	78
4.5	Fixed Effects Linear Models of Candidate Attack Percentage . . . . .	83
4.6	Percentage of Attacks on Personal Characteristics . . . . .	86
4.7	Fractional Logit Models of Candidate Personal Attack . . . . .	87
5.1	Hypothetical Issue Cooperation Patterns . . . . .	96
5.2	Issue Utility Estimates . . . . .	106
5.3	T-Tests of Issue Convergence . . . . .	110
5.4	Partisan Differences in Convergence . . . . .	111
5.5	Convergence by Campaign Actor . . . . .	114
A.1	Top Independent Groups, 2010 & 2012 . . . . .	128
A.2	Competitiveness of Races . . . . .	130
A.3	Issue Ownership and Salience Values . . . . .	132
B.1	Test of Interactions: Model of Media Spending . . . . .	133
B.2	Test of Interactions: Models of Attack Advertising . . . . .	134
B.3	Portion of Airings by Daypart . . . . .	136
B.4	Candidate Attack Models with Unweighted Airings . . . . .	138
B.5	OLS Model of Convergence . . . . .	139

## List of Figures

2.1	Relative Media Spending by Outside Groups, Senate 2010–2014 . . .	17
2.2	Total Expenditures in Congressional Campaigns, 2004 – 2014 . . . . .	18
3.1	Average Media Expenditures, Senate 2010–2014 . . . . .	46
3.2	Marginal Effects of Candidate Media Spending . . . . .	53
3.3	Marginal Effects of Race Competitiveness . . . . .	54
3.4	Marginal Effects of Race Competitiveness by Group Type . . . . .	58
4.1	Portion of Ad Volume Devoted to Attack, Kentucky Senate 2010 . . .	66
4.2	Relative Advertising Volume by Actor . . . . .	70
4.3	Percentage of Candidate Advertising Attacking Opponents . . . . .	71
4.4	Marginal Effects of the State of the Race . . . . .	79
4.5	Marginal Effects of Supporting Attacks from Outside Groups . . . . .	80
4.6	Marginal Effects of Supporting Attacks by Party . . . . .	81
5.1	Issue Mentions in 2010 . . . . .	101
5.2	Issue Mentions in 2012 . . . . .	102
5.3	Campaign Actor Convergence With Utility Estimates . . . . .	109
5.4	Change in Convergence From Candidates to Total Campaigns . . . .	112
5.5	Sample Campaigns with One S.D. Change in Convergence . . . . .	113
B.1	Convergence by Number of Issues Raised in Campaign . . . . .	140

# Chapter 1

## Introduction

In January 2010 the Supreme Court attracted a great deal of public attention when their decision in *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission (FEC)* eliminated the last remnants of bans on corporate and union-funded electioneering communications in the Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act (BCRA). Even before this decision corporations and unions could spend money from their treasuries on political ads that ran 30 days before a primary, 60 days before a general election, and did not directly advocate for the election or defeat of a candidate. Instead, the true importance of the *Citizens United* ruling was that the decision established a definition of corruption that included only a *quid pro quo* exchange of money for political favors (Tokaji and Strause 2014, 15). In March 2010 the D.C. Circuit Court relied on the narrow definition of corruption contained in the *Citizens United* decision and on the view in *Buckley v. Valeo* that restrictions on expenditures are subject to strict scrutiny when it decided in *Speechnow.org v. FEC* that limits on contributions to independent expenditure-only political committees were unconstitutional.

In the immediate aftermath of these cases, public attention was mostly focused on the relaxed restrictions on corporate expenditures in campaigns contained in the *Citizens United* ruling. The real impact, however, was that the D.C. Circuit Court's later decision created new, powerful players in American elections. The FEC issued guidance in response to the *Speechnow.org* decision in July 2010 instructing political

action committees (PACs) that they could raise funds without limits as long as they made only independent expenditures, effectively creating super PACs.<sup>1</sup> So-called “dark money” groups, 501(c)s, were technically unaffected by these rulings, but the clarity provided by the FEC on independent expenditures encouraged their rapid expansion as well.

Thus, key features of the current campaign finance system, super PACs and dark money groups, were created by court ruling, not by law. It is unlikely that the parties would have created a system on their own where candidates and parties face limits on the contributions they can receive while independent groups face almost no restrictions or limits. Have the parties successfully adapted to a system that was placed upon them by courts and is not one that they designed themselves through statute?

Furthermore, as the authorship of the advertising in campaigns has become shared with independent groups, have parties and candidates lost control of democratic deliberations in campaigns to electorally unaccountable actors? Political professionals from both parties and independent expenditure groups have voiced these concerns. Former Republican National Committee chairman Jim Nicholson said in 2014, “The party can’t coordinate with these super PACs and neither can the campaigns, so there’s a lot more chaos and disequilibrium in the campaigns. And the party structure clearly has a diminished role because they don’t have the resources they used to have” (Confessore 2014a). Mark Longabaugh, a Democratic consultant said while running A New Virginia PAC, “after Citizens United and all the cases

---

<sup>1</sup>Advisory opinions issued to Club for Growth (AO 2010-09) and Commonsense Ten (AO 2010-11)

that have led to [the] super PAC environment, deep-pocketed forces like this can now step in and hijack the debates” (Roarty 2012).

In this dissertation I argue that the parties have not lost control. Rather than campaigns being hijacked by policy-oriented interest groups, resilient parties and their candidates have co-opted the new instruments of super PACs and 501(c)s into their election-oriented campaigns. Candidates effectively share the message with outside groups and as a result candidates and parties get what they want out of this new system of electioneering.

Parties are increasingly thought of as networks of actors, but there has thus far been little research on the behavior of these networks and its implications for campaign agendas. This project posits a theory of cooperative campaigning that describes how networks of allies interact with one another in elections. The distribution of media resources across campaigns and the content of advertising produced by campaign actors reveals an effort to compensate for one another’s activities. It is not surprising that independent expenditure groups attempt to help candidates; after all, that is the point of their expenditures. It is the complexity of the cooperation, specifically a division of labor, that reveals the strength of relationships between actors.

The division of labor by candidates and outside groups would be an interesting but unimportant story if there were no consequences for democratic deliberations. However, outside groups have different capabilities and perspectives than candidates and these result in systematic differences in the tone and content of outside group advertising. Outside groups have been maligned for distorting politics by giving an outsized voice to the most monied interests in politics at the expense of the less

affluent. The following chapters show that outsiders have substantive effects on the discourse of campaigns, affecting the tone and the issue emphases in campaigns, and not always in the expected ways.

First, outsiders produce advertising that is more informative and less objectionable than candidate advertising. Outside groups tend to attack opponents based on the issues and not on personal matters. Such attacks are less likely than personal attacks to turn off voters and the attacks convey more information to voters about policy and candidate positions on issues. At least in this sense, independent groups have a positive effect on democratic deliberations.

Second, outside groups push campaigns to be more nationally homogeneous. Most of the outside activity comes from large groups with a national perspective and an interest in major national issues. When outsiders take on a larger role in campaign discourse, campaigns become more focused on a small set of national issues and less likely to engage local concerns or issues of interest to small, less monied interests. Over time, increasingly nationalized campaign messages can affect voters' images of the parties, fostering images that are less variable across different regions and among different groups. While nationalized campaign content encourages consistent party labels, it can also narrow the images of the parties and restrict their appeal to narrow portions of the electorate.

## **Plan of the Dissertation**

In the next chapter I describe the current legal landscape of federal legislative campaigns, the size and scope of independent group activity since the 2010 court rulings, and I fully develop the theory of cooperative campaigning. This theory

leads to several testable hypotheses about the relationships between candidate and outsider campaign communications and the consequences for the content of campaign advertising. To assess the empirical support for these hypotheses this dissertation examines cooperative campaigning and its consequences across three dimensions: spending across campaigns, the tone of the advertising within campaigns, and the issue content of the advertising within campaigns.

Chapter 3 uses a large original dataset of media spending in Senate campaigns from 2010 to 2014 to specify how a seat-maximizing strategy goes beyond simply directing money to the most competitive contests; it compensates for candidates with insufficient cash to meet the media demands of their race and passes by candidates with more ample resources. The observed pattern of outside group resource allocation reveals that outsiders in the aggregate pursue the seat-maximizing strategy expected from parties, but one subgroup of outsiders, issue-based independent groups, display small but important differences.

Chapter 4 demonstrates that candidates and outside groups divide the labor of attack advertising in campaigns. An analysis of the tone of all broadcast television political advertisements in the 2010 and 2012 congressional elections shows that as outside groups come into a campaign they “carry the negative,” primarily attacking opponents and allowing candidates to reduce their own proportion of advertising devoted to attack. This cooperative arrangement shields candidates from backlash that could result from attacks and allows the candidates to spend more time appearing positive and advocating for themselves. Secondly, this chapter shows that compensatory cooperation on the tone of advertising has unexpected consequences for the quality of information in campaigns. Outside advertising tends to be more focused



on policy matters and less focused on personal aspects of the candidates, so when outsiders pick up the role of attack, they elevate the discourse in campaigns by reducing the frequency of personal attacks and increasing the frequency of policy-based attacks.

Chapter 5 assesses the impact of outside groups on the issue agendas in legislative campaigns. Starting from an assumption that the issues most important to the electorate and the issues on which the candidate has an advantage over the opponent should be the basis of a rational campaign agenda, this chapter determines if candidates and outside groups work together to achieve this mix of issues. Consistent with the theory of cooperative campaigning, the sum of all actors' efforts more closely reflects the salient and more advantageous issues for the campaign than candidates' agendas or outsiders' agendas alone. Furthermore, this chapter shows that the major issues in legislative campaigns are not biased when issue-based groups have a larger role in the race. Despite a diverse set of actors with a variety of interests, legislative races are still primarily concerned with the issues most salient to the public and most closely identified with the parties.

Chapter 6 concludes with a summary of the evidence for a division of labor among actors across several dimensions of campaign communications. Second, this chapter considers the implications for democratic discourse of a decentralized system in which national, issue-oriented actors take on larger and sometimes dominant roles in campaign advertising. Finally, I speculate on the durability of this system and the ways in which cooperative arrangements between candidates, parties, and independent groups may evolve over the next several campaign cycles.

## Chapter 2

# Theory of Cooperative Campaigning

Various individuals, unions, corporations, and other groups have an interest in influencing elections. Most of the resources used to exert this influence were once directed to candidates and to parties. Resources still pass through parties and candidates through individual contributions and traditional PACs, but recent legal changes have placed a greater share of resources under the control of independent groups that conduct activities on their own without being filtered through candidates and the formal parties. What happens to campaign communications when there is a larger set of actors directly communicating to voters, and what do these changes tell us about the evolving roles of candidates, parties, and interest groups?

More broadly, the quality and the content of democratic discourse is at issue. The scale of independent activity has risen to the point that groups other than candidates are the majority voices on the airwaves in some campaigns. A system where outside groups pursue their own agendas is one where unelected, unaccountable, and sometimes anonymous actors can, through their political advertising, alter the issues and debates in American politics.

Television advertising is still the primary activity of federal campaigns, and it has well-documented influence on citizens' political knowledge, attitudes, and behavior. Campaign advertising has measurable effects on voters' candidate preference

and vote choice (Gerber et al. 2011; Goldstein and Freedman 2000; Shaw 1999). In addition, political advertising mobilizes citizens to vote (Goldstein and Freedman 2002), although it remains in dispute if negative advertising encourages turnout (Geer 2006; Wattenberg and Brians 1999) or discourages turnout (Ansolabehere and Iyengar 1995). The message content of campaign advertising educates citizens about the issues and candidates (Franklin 1991; Freedman, Franz, and Goldstein 2004), at times even more effectively than television news (Brians and Wattenberg 1996; Patterson and McClure 1976; but also see Zhao and Chaffee 1995). The selection and range of issues emphasized in campaign advertising help define what an election is “about”. Campaign themes influence the policy agenda in government when winning candidates seek to deliver on campaign promises (Sulkin 2011) and electoral victory is interpreted as a public mandate for the winning campaigns’ policy proposals.

Campaign agendas could become more chaotic as numerous groups independently produce messages, but it is more likely that actors tailor their behavior in response to the changing environment. In particular, I expect that most outside groups behave strategically and that outside groups and candidates synchronize their activities with each other in complex ways. Not all of these groups share identical motives and some variation occurs in the quality of cooperation due to differences in these actors’ objectives. But on balance parties and candidates get what they want out of their relationships with these new players. The degree and complexity of cooperation between candidates, parties, and independent expenditure groups indicates that the parties have reasserted control in a new system of network-based campaigning.

Independent groups have been characterized as disruptive interlopers in cam-

paings. A former state party chair remarked to *The New York Times*, “every time we empower independent third-party groups to do what the party is supposed to be doing, it diminishes the value of the brand and what the party represents” (Confessore 2011). Campaign staff from the 2012 congressional elections bemoaned the loss of message control by campaigns, remarking that “the campaign is not fully in charge of its own destiny as far as the messaging goes,” and that independent expenditure ads made their campaigns “dumber and sillier” (Tokaji and Strause 2014, 61). Some have argued that independent groups offer more support to the most extreme candidates, contributing to polarization in government (La Raja and Schaffner 2014). As independent groups increase in prominence, there is concern that these groups will become the center of gravity for electoral politics, cutting out the traditional formal party structure, low level activists, and party faithful (Gerken 2014). Independent groups have been called “a shadow party that’s effectively impossible to dislodge, and they will shape, if not control, the dialogue in key races and therefore nationally” (Parker 2014).

A more common view within political science, however, is that outside groups are closely linked to the formal party apparatus (Schlesinger 1985), and integrated pieces of a broader party network (Schwarz 1990). Parties are “enduring multi-layered coalitions” that include the independent groups that primarily support one party’s candidates (Herrnson 2009). These coalitions display their connections to one another in numerous ways. Many independent groups were created by party leaders and staffs often migrate between these groups, candidates, and the formal party organization (Farrar-Myers and Skinner 2012; Skinner 2005). Various groups on a partisan side often share mailing lists when communication is permitted (Koger,

Masket, and Noel 2009). A network analysis of the web of entities that make up the party networks places many of the major independent expenditure groups at or near the center of the overall party structures (Skinner, Masket, and Dulio 2012).

Rules that govern campaigns periodically change, and the various actors engaging in campaign activity adjust to these changing conditions in rational and strategic ways. Federal elections were party-centered in the early 20th Century, then became candidate-centered affairs in the 1960's and 1970's (Maisel and Brewer 2010; Wattenberg 1991). The cooperative activity described in this project, in particular a division of labor between campaign actors, illustrates how the parties have returned to prominence in campaigns through the use of networks of actors that seek to win elections in an environment that gives new advantages to actors outside of the candidates and traditional party organizations.

## **2.1 Federal Campaign Rules**

The crowded landscape of modern campaigns is a consequence of the rules governing campaign finance, and so it is first necessary to describe the evolution of these rules and how they created the set of actors in federal races. The current legal framework was not carefully designed by parties, candidates, and/or outside groups. It has been “cobbled together from (changing) congressional intent layered on regulatory interpretation and judicial revision” (Franz 2013, 7). Drawing from summaries by Corrado (2014), Dowling and Miller (2014), and Dwyre (2013) the two major acts of Congress and a series of court decisions over the last four decades that created this framework are described below. With each major change to these rules campaign actors responded, altering the level of message control by candidates,

parties, and independent groups.

In 1974 a heavily amended version of the Federal Election Campaign Act (FECA) was enacted, capping contributions to candidates, parties, and PACs. Candidates were the main recipients and spenders of resources, thus campaigns by this time were already candidate-centered with other actors in supporting roles. The 1976 *Buckley v. Valeo* decision that further refined FECA set the framework for the debate to follow, principally by drawing a distinction between limits on contributions and limits on expenditures. Contributions to candidates could be restricted based on a compelling state interest of preventing the reality or appearance of *quid pro quo* corruption. Restrictions on candidate expenditures, however, amounted to a restriction on speech. Limits on expenditures would thereafter be subjected to a higher level of constitutional scrutiny than contributions.

In this period private citizens, unions, interest groups, and corporations with a desire to be active in elections most often participated by contributing to candidates and parties (though corporations had to participate via individual donations from employees and stockholders. The Tillman Act of 1907 barring direct corporate contributions was then and is now still in force). Independent expenditures were permissible in this system, but remained uncommon. Instead, money was mostly directed to the candidates, who crafted their own messages. Limits on contributions to PACs were in place while the parties had the benefit of “soft money,” funds not subject to contribution limits that could be used for party-building efforts that indirectly supported candidates. This was the peak of the candidate-centered period, when candidates had direct control over nearly all of the paid media in their campaigns.

Beginning in 1996 the importance of other actors increased. Parties gained the ability to spend unlimited amounts in independent expenditures based on the decision in *Colorado Republican Federal Campaign Committee v. FEC*. Independent groups also became more active in this period through the use of “issue ads,” thinly veiled campaign advertisements that avoid using specific words such as “vote for” or “re-elect.” The communications of independent groups were likely dwarfed by candidate and party communications, but we cannot be certain because of poor reporting requirements at the time.

The enactment of BCRA in the 2004 campaign cycle ended the system under FECA that allowed parties to use soft money. The new law also sought to rein in issue ads. BCRA created the category of electioneering communications to include ads that refer to a candidate within 60 days of a general election and 30 days of a primary and are targeted to the candidate’s electorate. In 2007 the Supreme Court decision in *Wisconsin Right to Life v. FEC* narrowed prohibitions in BCRA on corporate electioneering communications, holding that if an ad could reasonably be interpreted as something other than a campaign ad, corporations could not be banned from funding it. Although soft money was eliminated in BCRA, parties adjusted well to changing circumstances. Hill Committees<sup>1</sup> have been very effective at raising hard money since the enactment of BCRA.

The current rules environment began in the 2010 election cycle. The Supreme Court decision in *Citizens United v. FEC* in 2010 eliminated the last remaining restrictions on electioneering communications by outside groups. In *Citizens United*

---

<sup>1</sup>Hill Committees are the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee (DCCC), Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee (DSCC), the National Republican Congressional Committee (NRCC), and the National Republican Senatorial Committee (NRSC).

the corruption rationale for restrictions on contributions was narrowed to include only *quid pro quo* corruption. This more narrow definition, combined with the *Buckley* framework that restrictions on expenditures should be subject to strict scrutiny since these restrictions amount to restrictions on speech came together in *Speechnow.org v. FEC*. In *Speechnow* the D.C. Circuit Court found that if an independent committee only made expenditures and did not contribute to candidate campaigns, contributions to the group could not be limited, essentially creating the expenditure-only super PACs. Super PACs and some types of non-profit organizations quickly became major players in federal campaigns.

## 2.2 Campaign Actors

The *Citizens United* and *Speechnow.org* decisions created incentives for many donors to transition into *campaign actors* - entities that create and disseminate their own political messages. Instead of simply handing resources over to the candidates and parties, individual donors and interest groups now have direct control of messaging to a degree not seen in the era of candidate-centered campaigns.

Campaign actors are divided here into categories based on fundraising constraints, communication constraints, and the objectives of the principals delegating the political communication to the campaign actors. Most broadly, there is a division between *candidates* and *outside groups*. Outside groups are in turn divided into *party committees* and three varieties of *independent groups*: *party-adjacent groups*, *issue-based groups*, and *single candidate groups*.

The key division between campaign actors is the official candidate committee and all outside groups. *Candidates* are defined as the campaign committees of



the candidates for office and *outside groups* are defined as all other groups making independent expenditures in support of and in opposition to candidates in elections. Three key features define the differences between candidates and outside groups. First, contributions to independent groups engaged purely in independent expenditures (not making any contributions to candidates and not communicating with candidates) are not capped, whereas there are legal limits on contributions to candidates and parties. Second, each actor sits on a different side of the communications “wall.” Candidates and outside groups are prohibited from communicating with one another once the candidate files paperwork with the FEC to officially enter the race. Third, there is a difference in accountability. Campaign actors are in an agency relationship where “one or more persons (the principal(s)) engage another person (the agent) to perform some service on their behalf which involves delegating some decision making authority to the agent.” (Jensen and Meckling 1976, 308). Different political interests - candidates for office, formal party organizations, and donors - are principals delegating the work of political communication to agents - campaign actors. Candidate committees are agents of the office seeker, whereas outside groups are agents of parties or donors.

Most broadly, outside groups are separated between *party committees* and *independent groups*. Both parties and independent groups are barred from communications with candidates, independent expenditure groups are further prohibited from communicating with the parties.<sup>2</sup> The key feature that differentiates these

---

<sup>2</sup>Party groups, at least in federal legislative races, are almost entirely made up of the four Hill Committees. Hill Committees typically have two separate entities - a coordinated campaign component that gives strategic advice to candidates and an independent expenditure component that produces and airs political messages in races. The independent expenditure arm of the Hill Committee cannot communicate with candidates, nor with the coordinated campaign. Each component

groups are the principals for each actor. Party committees are accountable to the formal party organization as it is traditionally conceived: organizational leadership and elected officials (Key 1964). Independent groups are instead responsible to their donors.

Similar to Magleby (2014b), independent groups are divided onto three categories: *party-adjacent groups*, *issue-based groups*, and *single candidate groups*. Independent groups, unlike candidates and parties, can receive unlimited donations. The independent groups are further differentiated by the principals' expectations of the objectives the groups will pursue. Party-adjacent groups pursue objectives identical to the national party and are often headed by prominent partisan campaign professionals, e.g. American Crossroads or Senate Majority PAC. Issue-based groups are formed around a single issue or a set of issues, or to represent the interests of a subgroup, e.g. League of Conservation Voters or U.S. Chamber of Commerce. Single candidate groups, the most recent innovation by campaigns, are expenditure-only groups formed strictly to support a single candidate in a single election.

Groups from each of these three categories of independent groups may take different organizational forms. In the realm of independent expenditures the two dominant organizational forms are expenditure-only committees (super PACs) and social welfare organizations (501(c)s). Both super PACs and 501(c)s can receive unlimited funds from any entity and can spend unlimited amounts on political activity if that activity is not coordinated with the candidate. 501(c)s can keep the identities of their donors secret, but must limit their political activity to less than half of their

---

cuts off communication with the other a few months before the election. The independent expenditure arms of Hill Committees are unrestricted in their spending in support of candidates and are what is referred to here.

total spending.<sup>3</sup> A third organizational form is the 527, which refers to the section of the IRS Code establishing that political money is not subject to taxation. All political committees registered with the FEC are 527s for IRS purposes, but not all of what the IRS considers 527s are political committees for the FECs purposes. In terms of political spending, the term 527 refers to groups who are not political committees under FECA. These groups, like super PACs, must disclose their donors. These groups still operate, but are far less prominent today compared to super PACs and 501(c)s.

The relative scale of each category of outside group’s campaign activity is not equal and changes from one election cycle to the next. The share of outside media spending by parties in Senate races (see Figure 2.1) has declined from 40% in 2010 to 23% in 2014.<sup>4</sup> Although the formal parties represent less of the total outside media spending today than in the first election cycle after *Citizens United*, party-adjacent groups quickly expanded to offset this decline. Party-adjacent groups made just 13% of media expenditures by outside groups in 2010 but made 36% in 2012 and 29% in 2014. Party and party-adjacent groups combined account for over half of mass media expenditures by outside groups in all three election cycles. Issue-based groups account for nearly all of the remaining media expenditures among outsiders: 45% in 2010, 32% in 2012, and 39% in 2014. Single-candidate groups attract much of the press attention about outside spending because their close relationships with

---

<sup>3</sup>501(c) is an Internal Revenue Service (IRS) designation that refers to the section of the U.S. Code classifying non-profit organizations. Many of these organizations, in particular 501(c)3 charities, cannot engage in any political activity. For the sake of brevity, within the context of this dissertation the term 501(c) is used to refer to the subtypes that do engage in independent political expenditures – mostly 501(c)4, (c)5, and (c)6s.

<sup>4</sup>A description of how the media spending figures were obtained is provided in Appendix A.

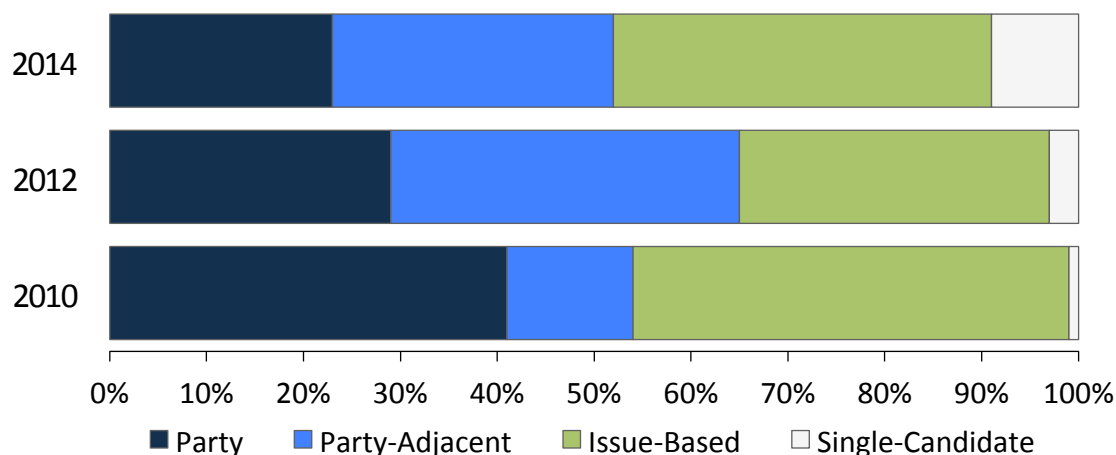


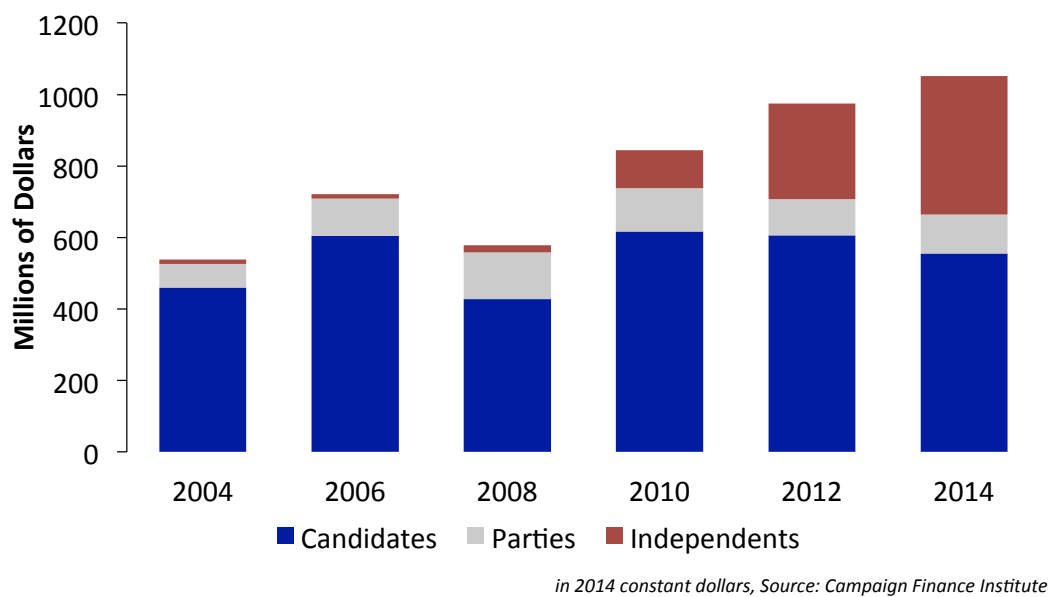
Figure 2.1: Relative Media Spending by Outside Groups, Senate 2010–2014

candidates seem to be an affront to the spirit of FEC rules. Within Senate races however, this variety of outside group accounts for just a tiny fraction of outside media spending (1% in 2010, 3% in 2012, and 9% in 2014).

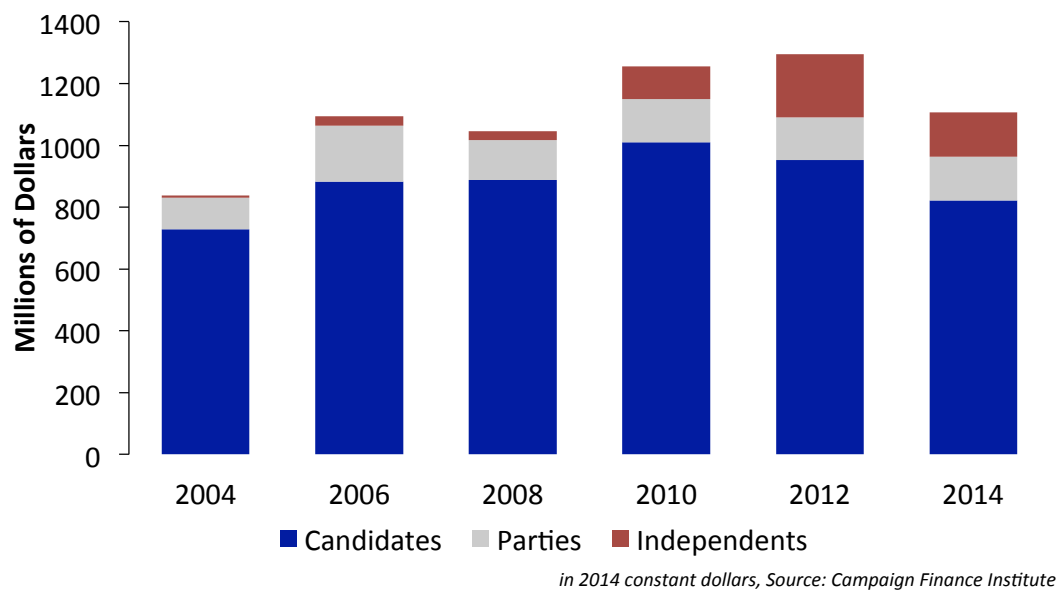
## 2.3 The Expanding Role of Outside Groups

Since 2010 independent spending has grown from an inconsequential portion of spending relative to candidates to a major portion of total expenditures, particularly in Senate races. The amount of money spent in federal legislative campaigns, in inflation-adjusted dollars, has risen since 2004, punctuated by a sharp increase in 2010. In terms of 2014 dollars, total spending in Senate races has risen from \$537 million in 2004 to \$1.05 billion in 2014, and in House races from \$838 million in 2004 to \$1.1 billion in 2014 (Campaign Finance Institute 2014).<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup>Total spending prior to 2004 is not shown because reporting of campaign expenditures by parties and independent groups was far less comprehensive than today, thus meaningful comparisons with earlier election cycles are not possible.



(a) Senate



(b) House

Figure 2.2: Total Expenditures in Congressional Campaigns, 2004 – 2014

Spending by independent groups in Senate races (see Fig. 2.2a) was just \$11 million in 2004 versus \$387 million in 2014 (all amounts are expressed in 2014 constant dollars). Candidate spending over this period has only modestly increased, going from \$460 million in 2004 to \$555 million in 2014. Parties spent just \$65 million in 2004, then increased their spending the following election cycle to \$104 million - a pace of expenditures that has been mostly steady since that year. While Senate candidates have slightly reduced their spending in 2012 and again in 2014, independent spending has more than compensated for the reduction.

Total spending in U.S. House races has generally increased since 2004 (see Fig. 2.2b), while spending by candidates has declined for two consecutive cycles from a high in 2010 of \$1 billion down to \$821 million in 2014 and independent spending was lower in 2014 (\$143 million) compared to 2012 (\$204 million). Independent spending in House races has not offset a decline in candidate spending as it did in Senate contests, most likely because fewer than normal House races have been competitive contests in 2012 and 2014.

Some of the increase in outside activity can be explained by political actors adapting and diverting resources from the parties into independent groups in a “hydraulic” process (Issacharoff and Karlan 1998; La Raja 2012), but independent spending only partially replaced soft money immediately after the enactment of BCRA (Weissman and Hassan 2006). Most of the soft money donors in the FECA system of campaign finance did not increase their hard money donations to candidates, parties, or independent groups in the election immediately after the enactment of the BCRA (Boatright et al. 2006). As shown in Fig. 2.2, independent spending became a significant force in campaigns only after the key court decisions in 2010.

It appears that the current system of financing federal campaigns has both provided a place for the former soft money donors as well as brought new players into federal campaigns. More importantly, it has given political donors more direct control of advertising message content than they had under the FECA system.

## **2.4 Theory and Hypotheses**

The shift of message control away from candidates and parties towards new independent actors could alter the volume, tone, and content of campaign advertising. It is not clear if campaign actors cooperate to exploit their unique characteristics and if campaign agendas remain coherent. I theorize that actors have adapted to the latest set of rule changes by compensating for each other and dividing the labor of campaigning. Furthermore, I expect that the precision of this cooperation and the content of the messages should vary based on which groups are participating in campaigns due to differences in the objectives of various campaign actors.

### **Objectives of Actors**

All campaign actors have the same basic objective of winning the election they are participating in, even though each of these categories of campaign actors have slightly different motives: candidates seek electoral victory (Downs 1957; Mayhew 1974), parties seek majorities in government (Aldrich 1995; Downs 1957) and independent expenditure groups must satisfy their donors or members (Skinner 2007). How these objectives influence the content of campaign actors' advertising has been largely unstudied, but previous scholarship on campaign spending illustrates campaign actors' differing objectives.

Table 2.1: Objectives of Campaign Actors

Campaign Actor	Objective
Candidates .....	Electoral victory
Parties .....	Majorities in government
Party-adjacent groups ....	Majorities in government
Issue-based groups .....	Advance policy goals
Single candidate groups ...	Electoral victory

Candidates display their self-interest and risk-aversion by holding on to their resources unless victory is almost certain (Jacobson 1985). Safe incumbent candidates will serve a broader interest by transferring funds out to party candidates in greater peril, but these transfers are done mostly by the safest senior incumbents (Heberlig and Larson 2005). In addition, safe incumbents sometimes prefer to hold their funds with an eye towards future elections. Legislators may plan to seek higher office in the next election cycle (Ansolabehere and Snyder 2000) or they may hold a war chest to deter the entry of quality challengers (Box-Steffensmeier 1996; Goidel and Gross 1994; Hersch and McDougall 1994).<sup>6</sup>

Parties have a broader objective than candidates in that they seek to win as many races as possible. Parties will distribute resources across contests to maximize the probability of obtaining or maintaining a legislative majority (Damore and Hansford 1999; Snyder 1989). Hill committees pay little attention to candidates' ideology or past loyalty, and instead base allocation decisions on each candidate's electoral chances (Cantor and Herrnson 1997; Kolodny 1998; Nokken 2003).

The motives of the individuals and organizations that finance independent

---

<sup>6</sup>A more recent analysis by Goodliffe (2001) concluded that war chests had no true deterrent effect, but this does not mean that officeholders don't believe that they do and act accordingly.



groups are not clearly understood. There are no large-scale empirical studies of the views and objectives of contributors to super PACs, and we do not even know the identities of contributors to 501(c)s. In general, the incentives for an individual to engage in political activity can be material, such as for obtaining a tax credit; the incentives could be solidary, such as socializing and a sense of group membership; or the incentives could be purposive, or ideological goals (Clark and Wilson 1961; Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995). Donors to congressional candidates are mostly motivated by ideological and policy agreement with the candidates, but all three types of incentives are at work among some donors (Barber, Canes-Wrone, and Thrower 2017; Francia et al. 2003).

Independent groups can pursue the objectives of their donors either through an access strategy or a replacement strategy (Franz 2011; Sorauf 1992). An access strategy seeks to gain the ear of lawmakers to influence policy outcomes, while a replacement strategy seeks to change the composition of legislatures and executive offices. Access is most efficiently sought through direct contributions, whereas independent expenditures are the preferred tool for a replacement strategy (Issacharoff and Peterman 2013). Patterns of independent expenditures by party-adjacent and issue-based independent groups in 2012 were more consistent with a replacement strategy than an access strategy (Dwyre and Braz 2015).

The expectations of donors have greater influence on independent groups than on candidates or parties. Donors to independent groups, much more than donors to candidates, expect to be kept abreast of the groups' activities and expect to have a voice in strategic decision making (Confessore 2014a; Issenberg 2015). Donors to party-adjacent groups should expect their resources to be devoted to a

seat maximizing strategy. For these groups this means behaving the same way as the Hill Committees - directing resources towards the most competitive contests in order to achieve or expand legislative majorities. Donors to issue-based groups are individuals and organizations with ideological or purposive goals that they are seeking to satisfy through elections. These donors should expect the groups to pursue a replacement strategy. Issue-based groups should direct resources to campaigning against the group's villains and supporting the group's champions, ideally using messages that are consistent with the group's issue(s) of interest. Lastly, donors to candidate specific groups will expect the group to pursue a purely pragmatic strategy of electoral victory and confine all of its activity to the single election of interest.

### **Cooperation Among Actors**

While campaign actors' objectives are not identical, the objectives are sufficiently related that actors should cooperate in the effort to win elections. Modern campaigns have been variously described as an orchestrated cooperation between parties and independent groups (Dwyre and Kolodny 2014; Kolodny and Dwyre 1998), as a partnership between parties and candidates (Brox 2013), and as a "team sport" or "elaborate dance" of sometimes specialized players working towards the shared goal of electoral success (Magleby 2011, 2014a; Magleby, Monson, and Patterson 2007). This project defines cooperation as campaign activity where the actors alter their spending and messages based on the activities of their allies. Independent campaign activity is expenditures and messaging that is done in support of a candidate but without consideration of how the activity fits in with the activities of other campaign actors supporting the candidate. Cooperative campaigning is the allocation of resources and the crafting of messages with awareness of the activities

of other actors and with attention toward achieving a preferred mix.

Cooperation can take two different forms, either *complementary* or *compensatory activity*. Complementary cooperative activity is parallel campaigning. Independent groups can adopt a spending pattern that mirrors the distribution of party resources, or outside group advertising can mention the same issues as those mentioned by the supported candidate. Compensatory cooperative activity is a division of labor. Outside media spending can compensate for a candidate with an insufficient war chest for a close race, or outside ads can attack the opponent while the candidate defines herself with supportive biographical spots.

Compensatory cooperation should be easiest to achieve when one actor faces constraints on its options. The constrained actor can be counted on to offer a constant type of support, so compensating for that actor and obtaining the preferred mix of activity does not require complicated signaling or potentially endless rounds of adjustments. Candidates can be counted on to spend as much as possible on media in close races, outside groups can be counted on to devote nearly all of their advertising to attacks on opponents, and issue-based groups will reliably focus on their core issues in advertising. In all of these situations compensatory cooperation between actors should be easily achievable as long as the actors are closely allied enough to do so.

Compensatory cooperative activity indicates an especially close and trusting relationship between independent groups, candidates, and parties. When a candidate divides the labor of campaigning with a theoretically independent group, the actor is partially conceding a task that they presumably believe is important based on trust that the outside advertiser will pick up this issue, task, or tactic. Such a high degree

of trust across actors suggests that independent groups are viewed by candidate campaigns as full and trusted members of the party network, not as a shadow party that is a rival for control of the agenda.

Outside groups face a challenge when cooperating with candidates, however. Any expenditures made by an outsider in coordination with a candidate are considered in-kind contributions and thus subject to contribution limits, set at \$5,000 for multi-candidate PACs in the 2015–2016 elections (Federal Election Commission 2015). The FEC defines a coordinated expenditure as one “made in cooperation, consolation or concert with, or at the request or suggestion of, a candidate, a candidate’s authorized committee, or their agents, or a political party committee or its agents.”<sup>7</sup> The basic structure of the FEC’s current coordination rules have two components: a content standard and a conduct standard. The content standard specifies the communications that are covered by the specific rule on coordination, while the conduct standard specifies what it means to engage in coordination.

Almost any public speech about a candidate satisfies the content standard. It covers any electioneering communication, republication of the candidate’s campaign materials, express advocacy, and other communication that is public, refers to candidates for federal office, and is directed at voters in the jurisdiction of that candidate. The content standard acts as a “filter or a threshold that screens out certain communications from even being subjected to analysis under the conduct standards”<sup>8</sup>

The conduct standard is the more important component of the definition of

---

<sup>7</sup>11 C.F.R. §109.20(a) (2004)

<sup>8</sup>11 C.F.R. §109.20(a) (1)-(3) (2004)

coordinated activity, but it is also the most difficult to clearly define and enforce. Communication is coordinated if any of the following types of conduct occur: the communication is created or disseminated at the request or suggestion of the candidate; if the candidate campaign is “materially involved in the decisions regarding” the content or where it is placed; if the communication is created or distributed after “substantial discussions” about the communication; if a common vendor acts as a conduit for information between independent group and campaign (although a vendor can have both of them as clients); if a former employee of the campaign then works for an independent group within the same campaign cycle and conveys information of behalf of the campaign.<sup>9</sup> If both the content and conduct conditions are satisfied, the communication by the independent group will be considered an in-kind contribution to the campaign and subject to the applicable contribution limits.

How, then, do campaign actors engage in cooperation? To explore how actors cooperate despite legal obstacles, I draw on recent press accounts and a set of eight one-on-one interviews with individuals with direct experience in the current campaign landscape conducted in June 2014. The interview respondents include campaign managers and campaign consultants for U.S. House and Senate races, senior leadership of expenditure-only groups (both Super PACs and 501(c)’s), a pollster, and a television executive responsible for advertising sales to political clients in over a dozen major media markets. All interviews were conducted “on background” since the interviews covered potentially sensitive topics of campaign strategy and techniques that push the limits of FEC regulations.

Campaign professionals on both the candidate and independent group side

---

<sup>9</sup>11 C.F.R. §109.21(d) (2004)

stated that outside groups and candidates attempt to synchronize their efforts with one another as much as FEC rules will allow. They can cooperate without crossing the threshold of coordination by communicating with one another before the candidate files with the FEC and the communications ban goes into effect, through the use of public information, sending out cues to one another, and because actors have formed reliable expectations of how the other actors will behave. Some techniques of signaling and cooperation may appear to push or surpass the limits of FEC rules, but campaign actors have little reason to be timid. The FEC often fails to issue any guidance to campaign actors because of a frequent partisan deadlock of 3-3 among FEC commissioners when groups request advisory opinions (Corrado 2014), leading FEC chairwoman Ann M. Ravel to tell one reporter, “The likelihood of the laws being enforced is slim . . . People think the F.E.C. is dysfunctional. It’s worse than dysfunctional” (Lichtblau 2015).<sup>10</sup>

Several respondents emphasized the importance of the early period before candidates file with the FEC to officially begin their campaigns – the moment that nearly all respondents referred to as “when the wall goes up.” The broad strategies for the campaigns are often determined in this early period, and benchmark polls are fielded to measure the salience of various issues, strengths and vulnerabilities of both candidates, and potential message lines. According to multiple respondents, public opinion information and strategic plans are closely shared before the communications ban kicks in.

Campaign strategies continue to evolve after the wall goes up. Respondents said that Super PACs, parties, and candidates all continue polling on their own after

---

<sup>10</sup>Ms. Ravel later resigned in frustration from the FEC in February 2017.

direct communication between candidates and independent expenditure groups is barred. Respondents professed confidence in the validity of their polls and believed that they would reach the same conclusions as their allies. One consultant said, “It’s pretty unlikely that our poll is going to find different things important to the voters than the candidate’s polls did.”

Obtaining information about the media spending of campaign actors is quite easy. Beginning in 2012 the Federal Communications Commission required top 4 network affiliates (ABC, CBS, FOX, and NBC) in the top 50 media markets to report political advertising buys to a public file (Farnam 2012). In 2014 this requirement was expanded to all U.S. markets. Interview respondents both in the television industry and in campaign management mentioned that one of the standard services provided to campaign actors by media buying firms are regular reports (weekly or sometimes daily) of other media buys in relevant markets, making tracking of both opponents’ and allies’ media buys a simple matter.

Outside actors and candidates make efforts to signal their messaging intentions to one another after the wall is up (Mattingly 2014). Several methods are now used by campaign actors to share strategic information with outside groups: a stand-alone corporation was created on the Republican side to disseminate opposition research among both candidates and independent expenditure groups while remaining compliant with FEC rules (Confessore 2014b); Twitter accounts were created on both sides to share polling information across party, candidate, and independent groups (Blumenthal 2014; Moody 2014); and Democratic candidates and the DSCC both posted “important messages” on their websites to highlight issues that were soon taken up by ads from Senate Majority PAC and Patriot Majority USA

(Sullivan 2014). One political director for a Super PAC interviewed for this project stated that his group rarely makes media buys, but instead shares information and coordinates efforts among independent allies during a campaign through research and regular conference calls with independent groups participating in the race. So, while the communications ban prevents coordination between candidates and outside groups, outside groups can and (at least occasionally) do coordinate with one another.

In the event that any allied independent groups are not monitoring media buying closely enough, parties communicate spending information to independent groups through press releases that announce media buys and party websites that feature lists of targeted contests (Dwyre and Kolodny 2014). Candidate committees can send out signals about strategic preferences using conference calls with donors. One campaign manager interviewed for this project described how earned media can be used to signal the issues that the campaign would like to emphasize. Multiple respondents described instances where outside groups ran undesirable ads, press releases, or tweets. When the candidate campaign wants to get that ad or tweet taken down, the candidate committee will harness the power of the party network and immediately voice their displeasure in every direction they legally can. Party networks are sufficiently intertwined that it rarely takes longer than a day for word of the campaign's ire to reach the ears of the offending outside group.

Campaign actors can also synchronize their efforts because actors' behavior is predictable. Campaign staff, Hill Committee leadership, and independent group leaders frequently swap roles and have all learned their craft in the same arena. Interview respondents expressed confidence in other major actors in campaigns because



they are “pros” or “veterans.” Since they all know the same strategies, they can properly interpret the moves of other actors. One consultant described campaigning in the age of super PACs like playing the card game bridge: “My partner should be able to pick up on the signals about my cards based on my play.”

Some actors have reputations for particular tendencies. One respondent from a super PAC said that some candidates will be known for a reluctance to go negative in a campaign, so the outside groups will pick that task up right away. Two respondents felt that the advertising from issue-based groups tended to hew towards the groups’ core issues, so other actors needed to adjust their own messaging.

Based on press accounts and feedback from campaign professionals in one-on-one interviews, campaign actors appear to have mostly solved their communication challenges. Having successfully adapted to the legal landscape, campaign actors should divide the labor of campaigns with the success of cooperation hinging on the congruence of the actors’ objectives.

## **Hypotheses**

This project is interested in how these cooperative arrangements impact the content of campaigns. Cooperation between actors can occur across a range of different activities such as logistics, get-out-the-vote operations, paid media, and others. Given the importance of the message for shaping the tone and the issues of the election and influencing voters’ images of the parties, cooperation on the volume and content of advertising carries the most significant consequences. If independent advertising is out of sync with the efforts of traditional campaign actors it may promote different candidates than the parties would, make campaigns more (or less) negative

and corrosive, or elevate different issues in campaigns. Campaigns conducted by a cooperative network of actors, however, will feature a coherent set of messages and a rational and efficient distribution of those messages across campaigns.

Compared to more tactical considerations in campaigns (e.g., canvassing, fundraising, phone banking, etc.), the secondary objectives of campaign actors will manifest themselves most clearly in campaign advertising. The secondary objectives will partially determine how groups distribute money across races and the tone and issue content of their advertising. In other words, when the advertising expenditures are from the National Republican Senatorial Committee versus from the National Rifle Association it will have predictable effects on which candidates benefit and the issues addressed in the ads.

This study examines cooperation and its consequences across three dimensions of campaign advertising: the distribution of advertising resources across races, the tone of the advertising, and the issue content of the advertising. Measuring cooperation on media spending across contests takes a broad view of cooperative behavior and tells us the degree to which outside groups are pursuing a seat-maximizing strategy consistent with the objectives of parties. Measuring cooperation in advertising tone and issue content evaluates the level of cooperation within races and its effect on campaign agendas and discourse.

### ***Spending***

Candidates are more constrained than outside groups in their ability to spend on media in a race. Most candidates have limited resources and candidates in competitive contests will spend all available cash on their campaign. Outside groups can

distribute their resources across races as they see fit, and can augment spending of candidates who are unable to meet the media demands of their race. Within similarly competitive races, outside groups will spend more to support candidates who spend less.

**Compensatory spending hypothesis:** Outside groups, holding other factors constant, will allocate media spending in inverse response to supported candidates' media spending.

Whereas parties and party-adjacent groups will distribute their resources in a way that best compensates competitive candidates with insufficient cash, issue-based groups attempt to replace policy opponents and elect policy champions (Bawn et al. 2012). A replacement strategy still steers resources to competitive contests since these races are the ones where replacement is possible, however the inverse association will not be as strong because of secondary, competing objectives.

**Issue bias hypothesis:** Issue-based independent groups media spending will be more weakly associated with candidate media spending than parties and party-adjacent independent groups.

### ***Tone***

Interview respondents from both candidate campaigns and independent expenditure groups stated that outside groups are expected to “carry the negative,” that is, candidates assume that outside groups will run almost entirely attack advertising. Candidates are then free to run more biographical or other advocacy

advertising to promote themselves. This expectation comes from both past behavior and practical convenience.

Outside groups usually prefer attacking opponents instead of defining the favored candidate (Ridout and Franz 2011), and supportive advertising is harder to create when coordination with the candidate is prohibited. One interview respondent thought that supportive advertising by outside groups is still rare further down the ballot from the presidential race because “even today b-roll is still hard to come by on most Senators and especially House members.” Given this constraint, candidates will compensate for outside group attacks by altering their advertising mix of attack and advocacy.

**Compensatory tone hypothesis:** As the volume of attack advertising by supporting outside groups increases, the proportion of candidate attack advertising decreases.

Outside groups attacking the opponent is an ideal form of compensatory cooperation when outside groups run the most vitriolic attacks. An employee of Priorities USA Action remarked in an interview, “We . . . can say things that the campaign can’t say” (Magleby and Goodliffe 2014). Outside group attacks can be more controversial while shielding the candidate from public backlash when the advertising sponsor is not the candidate (Brooks and Murov 2012; Dowling and Wichowsky 2013, 2015). Furthermore, the degree of insulation should vary by type of outside group. When the party mounts an unfair attack backlash is reasonable to expect – it is a campaign actor easily connected back to the candidate by even poorly informed voters. Independent groups with vague names should be much harder for voters to link back to

candidates, however. A party-adjacent dark money group with less narrowly issue-focused donors and without an obvious connection to the supported candidate should be the least constrained by concerns about backlash.

**Insulation hypothesis:** Independent group attack advertising will be more likely than candidates or parties to be based on opponents’ personal characteristics.

It is not clear that all outsiders exploit this advantage, however. One study of independent advertising in the 2012 presidential campaign found that outside ads were not considered more negative or more misleading by voters than ads from the candidates (Dowling and Miller 2014). In addition there are reasons to expect that outsiders are more policy-oriented in their attacks. Issue-based groups are formed around policy goals, and will likely be focused on those issues in their advertising, e.g. the Sierra Club will be more likely to attack a candidate’s environmental record than a candidate’s honesty. Parties and party-adjacent groups have broader agendas, but they also divide their attention across numerous races. Outside groups with an interest in many races will sometimes use nearly identical advertising, “cookie-cutter ads”, across numerous races (Goldstein, Franz, and Ridout 2002; Memmott 2010). Cookie-cutter ads will more likely be broad-based attacks, e.g. “voted with Nancy Pelosi 95% of the time,” and will not be customized to address specifics of the opponent’s character. In essence, many outside groups have larger agendas and don’t concern themselves with the minutiae of each individual opponent.

**Outside agendas hypothesis:** Multi-race outside groups will be more likely than candidates to engage in policy-based attacks.

## ***Issues***

Campaign actors should not be indifferent to the set of issues emphasized in the race. One view expects that campaigns attempt to shape the campaign agenda by focusing the electorate's attention towards those issues that favor them and hurt the opponent (Riker 1983). The theory of issue ownership holds that voters generally trust one party to handle some issues better than the other party, and a key objective of campaign advertising is to prime considerations of the issues that the favored candidates party "owns" (Petrocik 1996). An alternative view expects that campaigns must address those issues that are especially salient to the public, regardless of which party owns the issue (Kahn and Kenney 1999). In isolation neither issue ownership or salience theory have provided a tidy explanation for congressional campaign agendas (Sides 2007), and the reality likely sits somewhere in the middle. The utility of an issue for a campaign actor should be a combination of both issue reputations of the parties and issue importance in the public, and thus a model that accounts for both is likely more predictive.

Outside groups potentially complicate candidates' pursuit of coherent issue agendas. Only recently has research begun to emerge on the issue content of outside advertising, and initial analyses of candidate and outside group ads find that the issue content from outside groups converges poorly with the issue content of the candidates advertising they support (Franz 2014; Franz, Fowler, and Ridout 2016). Campaign actors are skilled at communicating their preferences to each other, and it is unlikely that candidates and outside groups would be content with their efforts resulting in random issue agendas. This suggests that the lack of convergence is not accidental and that campaign actors divide the labor of raising issues in the

campaign. When outside groups and candidates cover different issues but are engaged in compensatory cooperation with each other, the sum of all actors' efforts should converge with estimates of issue utilities.

**Compensatory Issue Hypothesis:** Total campaign advertising (the sum of candidate advertising and supporting outside advertising) will reflect issue utilities more closely than candidate or outside advertising alone

The differing objectives of outside groups will be apparent in the issue content of their advertising. In short, parties and party-adjacent groups should converge most strongly with issue utility estimates, and issue-based groups should converge most weakly with these estimates. The donors to issue-based groups expect the group to engage in electioneering in a way that is consistent with the group's stated policy goals. This expectation by donors will constrain issue-based groups in their selection of issues to advertise even if the core issue position that a group shares with the supported candidate is unimportant to voters in the election. For example, Sierra Club advertising attacking Senator Portman in Ohio emphasizes clean air even though the environment is highly unlikely to be a central issue in the 2016 election, and Portman's opponent must appeal to Southeast Ohio voters who still rely on the coal industry for jobs (Cama 2015). When issue-based groups support candidates, then, that support should have a bias away from a purely pragmatic issue agenda.

**Issue bias hypothesis:** Issue-based group advertising content will have the weakest association among all group types with issue utility estimates.

Parties and party-adjacent groups have their attention spread across many districts in an election season, and they have an interest in maintaining a consistent

message that maintains a party’s “brand.” Individual candidates, however, have more localized knowledge and unique backgrounds that will influence their advertising agendas. As a result parties and party-adjacent groups, of all campaign actors, will converge most strongly with issue utility estimates.

**Party bias hypothesis:** Parties and party-adjacent group advertising content will have the strongest association among all group types with issue utility estimates.

Support for these hypotheses suggests that secondary objectives of campaign actors guide outside groups’ advertising content more strongly than local considerations or individual candidate characteristics. Furthermore, it suggests that large, multi-race outside groups are nationalizing influences on campaigns, homogenizing advertising content across districts.

## 2.5 Summary

Recent changes to the laws that govern federal campaigns, particularly the two key 2010 court decisions, have encouraged strategic actors to respond by creating powerful independent groups to disseminate political messages. Based on a series of elite interviews and numerous press accounts I have offered a theory that these campaign actors engage in compensatory cooperation to take advantage of actors’ strengths, offset actors’ weaknesses and divide the labor of campaigns. Support for the hypotheses presented here offers powerful evidence that federal campaigns are moving away from candidate-centered politics and towards a system of network-centered politics where the control of the message is shared by several actors.



In the following three chapters I evaluate the theory that campaign actors divide the labor of campaigns, whether the types of groups engaging in these activities have predictable effects, and what the consequences are for the content of campaign advertising. I examine, in turn, spending across races, the tone of advertising within campaigns, and the issue content within campaigns. The next chapter takes a broad view across campaigns to assess whether outside groups distribute media expenditures in ways that mirror the objectives of parties, or if divergent interests cause independent groups to allocate these funds differently.

## Chapter 3

### Cooperative Media Spending in Senate Elections

The first evaluation of compensatory cooperation between actors takes a broad view across campaigns. This chapter examines whether the allocation of outside resources is consistent with the seat-maximizing preferences of parties, or if the expanded role of outside interest groups has caused distribution decisions to be driven by more programmatic or ideological considerations. If campaign actors are in a compensatory relationship with one another and outside groups are seat-maximizers in the aggregate, it should be observable in the distribution of resources across races.

This chapter will show that even though most outside money is no longer directly controlled by the parties, most outside resources are distributed in a compensatory, office-seeking manner. Among similarly competitive contests support is directed to the races where preferred candidates have the most strained budgets and away from races where preferred candidates have the most ample resources. The pattern of cooperative spending demonstrates that outside groups are sophisticated in their support of candidates, well-informed about the financial state of candidates, and when taken together pursue the same goal as the parties. One variety of groups, issue-based independent groups, have observable differences in the distribution of their media dollars, though even these groups are only somewhat more likely to behave in an ideological way.

### **3.1 Allocation Priorities of Actors**

The ideal distribution of resources by outside groups seeking to maximize the number of seats won should ensure that the total resources brought to bear in races is sharply peaked on those contests that are most competitive. This does not simply mean that any given group should allocate their dollars to the closest races, however. Candidates will each have a different amount of their own funds dedicated to electioneering. Ignoring candidate spending would create inefficiencies in the distribution of funds across a party's field of candidates.

When numerous groups are conducting their own campaign communications such inefficiencies could arise in the distribution of resources across races for two reasons. First, independent expenditure groups cannot communicate with the candidates they seek to support (though independent groups can communicate with one another). Second, the secondary objectives of the groups can alter their allocation decisions. As discussed in the previous chapter, information about media buys and candidate budgets is easily accessible so information should not be an obstacle to resource allocation decisions. However, secondary objectives should create observable biases in the allocation of resources by some independent groups, specifically, issue-based groups who seek to replace the opponents of their policy goals and to defend the champions of their policies.

### **Hypotheses**

Candidates are more constrained than outside groups in their ability to spend on media in a race. Most candidates have limited resources, and candidates in competitive contests will spend all available cash on their campaign. Outside groups

can distribute their resources across races as they see fit, and outside groups on balance should be strategic seat-maximizers. Because outside groups are the less constrained actor, outside groups should engage in compensatory cooperation with candidates in mass media spending. When independent groups are behaving as full partners with parties the distribution of outside money across races will, in addition to race competitiveness, account for the financial state of the candidates.

**Compensatory spending hypothesis:** Outside groups, holding other factors constant, will allocate media spending in inverse response to supported candidates' media spending.

While parties and party-adjacent groups should be pure seat maximizers, issue-based groups should seek to replace policy opponents. This objective will still steer their funds towards close races since these are the only seats realistically eligible for replacement. Among close races, however, they should choose to support candidates based on policy criteria instead of concerns of partisan majorities and will be less sensitive to considerations of candidate budgets. Therefore, issue-based independent group media spending will have a weaker association with candidate media spending compared to parties and party-adjacent groups.

**Issue bias hypothesis:** Issue-based independent groups media spending will be more weakly associated with candidate media spending than parties and party-adjacent independent groups.

## 3.2 Data

Overall spending is only a rough measure of campaign activity (Ansolabehere and Gerber 1994). Some campaign expenditures are made with the purpose of defining the issues, raising public awareness of the candidate, and defining the opponent. Other expenses service the operational needs of the organization, conduct fundraising, polling, and manage get-out-the-vote efforts. In addition to the variety of purposes of expenditures, there is heterogeneity in how different candidates allocate resources. Some candidates may spend lavishly on travel and meals while other campaigns may spend nearly all resources on television spot buys.

Therefore, the hypotheses about the allocation patterns for outside groups are evaluated by observing spending on mass media by campaign actors. Different campaign actors spend their money in a variety of different ways, and outside groups only report expenditures directly related to electioneering activities to the FEC while candidates report all of their expenditures. Total spending by outside groups is simply not comparable to candidate spending.

Furthermore, observable cooperative behavior between outside groups and candidates should occur based on media activity. Outside groups making independent expenditures devote almost all of their activity to mass media. When these groups look to compensate for a candidate, it should be compensation based on media activity (or lack thereof). Examining media expenditures alone allows for a clearer view of compensatory behavior between campaign actors.

Campaign mass media expenditures in all U.S. Senate races from 2010 through 2014 were assembled using FEC records of all expenditures by major party and viable independent Senate candidates, all electioneering communications expendi-

tures, and all expenditures by independent groups in the 2010 through 2014 elections (N=566,502). The expenditures were categorized by the type of activity, and media expenditures were isolated from all other expenditures. Expenditures for production and media buys of mass advertising on television, radio, online, and (in theory but rarely in practice) newspapers were classified as mass media (a complete description of the coding process is provided in the Appendix).

On average, Senate candidate committees devoted half of their expenditures to mass media (51% and 52%, see Table 3.1). Independent expenditures by parties were virtually all spent on mass media (99% in each year). Like parties, independent groups allocated the vast majority of their reported spending to mass media (81% and 82%). Because of vastly different allocation patterns and reporting requirements, directly comparing independent expenditures to candidate expenditures significantly understates the relative weight of independent advertising spending versus candidate advertising spending.

As a race becomes increasingly competitive, the ideal level of resources allocated to that race should increase at a roughly exponential, not linear rate (Jacobson 1985). Table 3.2 shows the pairwise correlation of media spending to the competitiveness of the contest. The competitiveness of the race is measured using race ratings from the Rothenberg Political Report near the peak of the campaign cycles: October 1, 2010 and October 5, 2012.<sup>1</sup> A simple approximation of the expected association between spending and competition is to square the categorical values for

---

<sup>1</sup>Rothenberg uses a nine category scale to reflect the probability that one party or the other will win the seat, not the expected vote share. A six-point competitiveness scale is created by folding Rothenberg's scale and breaking out safe seats where no challenger filed with the FEC into an "uncontested" category.

Table 3.1: Media Spending in Senate Campaigns, 2010–2014

	Mean	Std. Dev.	Pct. of Expenditures
2010			
Candidates	\$4,270,925	\$4,677,329	51%
Parties	\$883,852	\$1,889,768	99%
Independents	\$1,306,386	\$2,370,966	81%
Total Campaign	\$6,461,162	\$6,961,625	59%
2012			
Candidates	\$5,208,092	\$5,922,890	52%
Parties	\$1,268,066	\$2,121,134	99%
Independents	\$3,234,906	\$4,992,564	81%
Total Campaign	\$9,711,064	\$9,855,052	63%
2014			
Candidates	\$4,137,024	\$3,874,747	51%
Parties	\$1,368,615	\$2,702,570	99%
Independents	\$4,578,330	\$7,399,540	82%
Total Campaign	\$10,083,969	\$12,177,603	67%

*Source: FEC Candidate Disbursements and Independent Expenditures files*

Table 3.2: Correlations of Media Spending with Competition

	2010	2012	2014
Candidate Media	.50	.42	.45
Party Media	.71	.79	.70
Independent Media	.77	.65	.75
Total Media	.79	.76	.75

*Pairwise correlations between media spending and race competitiveness squared*

competitiveness, rescaling the measure from 0 – 5 to 0 – 25, and measure the linear association between spending and the squared competitiveness term.

Candidates in the closest contests exert more effort towards fundraising and attract more money but these contributions are capped, so candidates are more constrained in their ability to draw resources than outside groups who face no limits and can move money freely across races. As a result, candidates are limited in their ability to match their media spending to the closeness of the race (.50 in 2010, .42 in 2012, and .45 in 2014). Party media support through independent expenditures is fluid across contests and thus is more closely concentrated on the tightest races (.71, .79, and .70), partially correcting for the inefficiency of the allocation of candidate media (Cantor and Herrnson 1997; Jacobson 2010). Independent groups also have complete freedom to allocate their resources across races as they see fit, and like parties they also pour most of their resources into the closest contests (Franz, Rivlin, and Goldstein 2006; Herrnson 2009; Herrnson, Patterson, and Curtis 2014), resulting in total media spending having a close association with competitiveness (.79, .76, and .75).

The current system of campaign finance that places more resources in the hands of non-candidate actors results in media spending skewing more strongly than



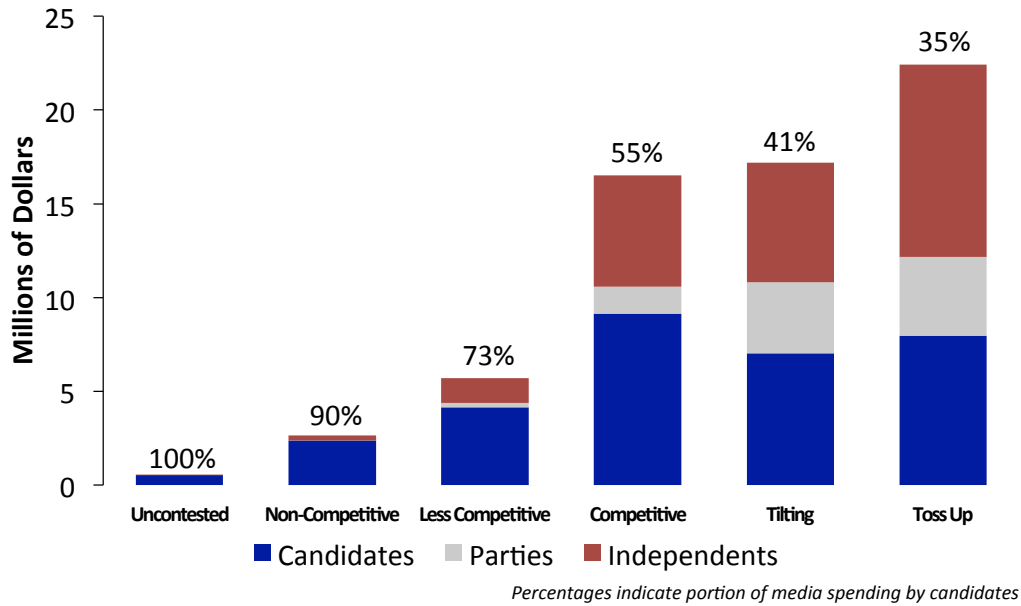


Figure 3.1: Average Media Expenditures, Senate 2010–2014

ever towards the closest contests. As a result, candidate spending is often outpaced by outside spending in the closest races as shown in Figure 3.1. The percentage of total media spending controlled by candidates (candidate media / candidate media + outside media) is shown at the top of each stacked bar of candidate, party, and independent group mass media spending.

In close races where the message matters most, candidates have the least control over the message. Outside groups on average match or exceed candidate media spending in races in the top three categories of competitiveness.<sup>2</sup> Outside groups made two-thirds of media expenditures in *toss up* races, three-fifths in *tilting*

<sup>2</sup>Media spending levels by candidates and outside groups do not directly reflect the difference in advertising reach. The Federal Election Campaign Act (FECA) requires that broadcasters offer advertising time at the “lowest unit charge” to federal candidates in the last 45 days before a primary and 60 days before a general election (U.S.C. §315(b)(1)(A)). Candidates thus pay much less than outside groups for the same advertising spots (Fowler and Ridout 2012).

races, and nearly half in *competitive* races. To put the competitiveness ratings into context, races categorized as *toss up* were won on average by 4 percentage points, *tilting* races by 7 percentage points, and *competitive* races by 14 percentage points. Even races that were ultimately not especially close, outside groups were even partners with candidates in terms of media spending.

### 3.3 Analysis

The compensatory spending and issue bias hypotheses are tested using models which estimate the level of outside media spending in Senate campaigns from 2010 to 2014. The unit of analysis is the campaign (N=187), for example the Republican and Democratic efforts to win a given Senate seat constitute two cases in the dataset.<sup>3</sup> The dependent variable, *outside media*, is the spending in dollars by outside groups on media in each Senate campaign. The level of outside spending is modeled as a function of several variables listed in Table 3.3.

Outside group spending for each race is calculated as the total spending designated in FEC reports as supporting the candidate plus the total spending designated as opposing that candidate's opponent. Electioneering communications are not designated as supporting or opposing candidates, and only report which candidates were mentioned. Support or opposition is determined by comparing the ideology of the group engaging in the communication with the party affiliation of the mentioned candidate. Similarly, in rare cases of races with a third viable candidate the opposing spending is "credited" to the correct candidate based on the party affiliation or

---

<sup>3</sup>The sample includes 5 independent campaigns (Florida and Alaska in 2010, Maine and Maryland in 2012, and South Dakota in 2014) and drops the 2012 and 2014 Louisiana Senate campaigns due to the state's unusual blanket primary and short, late general election phase.

Table 3.3: Summary Statistics for Model of Outside Spending

	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min.	Max.
<u>Dependent Variable:</u>				
Outside media	4,430,061	7,368,863	0	36,943,720
<u>Independent Variables:</u>				
Candidate media	4,785,927	4,975,101	250	26,973,317
Race competitiveness	<i>(for the distribution see Table A.2, Appendix A)</i>			
Opposing media	9,432,724	10,091,383	0	45,263,471
Incumbent candidate	33%	—	0	1
Democratic candidate	47%	—	0	1
Republican candidate	50%	—	0	1
Independent candidate	3%	—	0	1
Size of media markets	926	890	77	5,504
N	187			

ideological position of the group reporting the expenditure as well as press accounts, if needed.

The independent variable of interest is *candidate media* spending, also measured in dollars. The compensatory spending hypothesis predicts that within similarly competitive races when a candidate spends less on media outside groups will increase their supportive spending, or when a candidate spends more on media outside groups will offer less support. Therefore, this hypothesis predicts that the variable will have a negative relationship with outside spending.

To assess how candidate media expenditures are associated with outside group media spending in support, it is necessary to control for other major factors that affect the level of outside media spending in Senate contests.

The strongest predictor should be the closeness of the contest, accounted for in the model with race ratings from the Rothenberg Political Report from the first week of October in each election year. A five-point competitiveness scale is created

by folding Rothenberg’s scale. The folded race rating is treated as an ordinal measure and included as a set of four dummy variables, *toss up*, *tilting*, *competitive*, and *less competitive*, with the category *non-competitive* omitted.

The total *opposing media* spending measures the intensity of activity by the opposing side(s). Outside groups should reinforce candidates with supporting advertising more strongly when the opposing side spends more on media, thus this variable should have a positive effect on outside spending. Opposing media is measured in dollars combining the total media expenditures by opposing candidates and the opposing outside groups supporting that candidate.

Senate contests occur in states with very different media costs to reach the voters. New Hampshire has about 666,000 registered voters, but to reach them campaigns must advertise in the very costly Boston market as well as the Manchester and Burlington markets. In contrast, Georgia has about 4,076,000 registered voters who can be reached more efficiently and economically via Atlanta and several small markets such as Augusta and Macon. To account for this difference, a value for the size of the media markets is calculated as the total number of television homes in the market obtained from Nielson, weighted by the number of ads from Senate races in that market, taken from data from the Wesleyan Media Project for 2010 and 2012 (Fowler, Franz, and Ridout 2014, 2015). Because advertising costs are closely tied to the size of the media markets, this variable can be thought of as capturing the average cost of the average television advertisement for a Senate campaign (The media market size values for the above example are 2,302 for New Hampshire and 631 for Georgia).

Incumbent candidates often attract more direct contributions from PACs and

often receive more party support. Super PACs and other independent groups may also prefer to back incumbents, so *incumbency* is included as a dummy variable in the model to account for this possibility. In the immediate aftermath of the 2010 court decisions Republicans were faster to adapt to the change in the campaign finance environment and more reliant on independent expenditure support in their campaigns, so party affiliation is included as a categorical variable (the omitted category in the estimated model is Democrat). Finally, since this is a pooled model and outside spending has risen in each election cycle, the earlier election years are included as two dummy variables (omitting 2014) to account for this change.

The dependent variable in the model, outside media spending, is bounded at zero. More specifically, outside groups must first decide whether to spend in support of a candidate, then if they decide to spend they must decide how much. This type of process is represented well by a tobit model (Wooldridge 2003). A linear regression model, in addition to making impossible negative predictions for some campaigns, would yield biased and inconsistent parameter estimates whereas the tobit model estimated using maximum likelihood provides consistent parameter estimates (Long 1997). The base model takes the following form:

$$outmedia_i = \begin{cases} y_i^* & \text{if } y_i^* > 0 \\ 0 & \text{if } y_i^* \leq 0 \end{cases} \quad (3.1)$$

$$y_i^* = \beta_0 + \beta_1 canmedia_i + \sum_{j=2}^5 \beta_j rating_i + \beta_6 oppmedia_i + \beta_7 marketsize_i \\ + \beta_8 incumbent_i + \beta_9 rep_i + \beta_{10} ind_i + \beta_{11} 2010_i + \beta_{12} 2012_i + e_i$$

In addition to this base model, two other models are estimated for all outside activity. First, a partisan model is estimated which includes an interaction

between Republican and candidate media spending to look for differences in the inverse relationship of spending between candidates and outside groups by party. Because Republicans more quickly embraced super PACs and 501(c)s than Democrats, the strength of association between candidate and outside media spending may be stronger for Republicans. Second, a model interacting election year with the independent variable of interest, candidate media spending, is also estimated to examine how stable the expected relationship is across election cycles (an additional robustness check interacts all other model variables with election year to evaluate the validity of pooling the sample and finds no other variables and can be found in Appendix B).

The coefficients from the tobit models are shown in Table 3.4. These coefficients represent the linear effect of the independent variables on the latent  $y^*$  not on the observed dependent variable, so they cannot be interpreted in the same way as OLS estimates. To better describe the substantive effects of the key independent variables on outside media spending, marginal effects are calculated and shown in Figures 3.2 and 3.3.<sup>4</sup>

### **Compensatory Spending**

The results support the main hypothesis that outside media spending has an inverse association with the supported candidate's media spending. The association between candidate media spending and outside group media spending is negative and statistically significant. The marginal effect of candidate media spending on the predicted level of outside group media spending to support that candidate in the

---

<sup>4</sup>The marginal effects reported here are for an unconditional expected value of outside media spending evaluated at the means of the other independent variables.

Table 3.4: Tobit Models of Outside Media Spending, Senate 2010–2014

Independent Variables	Base Model	Partisan Model	Yearly Model
Candidate media spending	-0.21** (0.08)	-0.23 <sup>+</sup> (0.12)	—
Candidate media × 2010	—	—	-0.16 (0.12)
Candidate media × 2012	—	—	-0.35*** (0.09)
Candidate media × 2014	—	—	0.44* (0.17)
Less competitive race	2,782,578** (1,000,888)	2,485,229* (1,006,542)	1,856,103 <sup>+</sup> (951,785)
Competitive race	4,210,677** (1,279,184)	4,068,863** (1,286,821)	3,105,069* (1,224,630)
Tilting race	6,624,610*** (1,285,569)	6,692,530*** (1,288,646)	5,909,011*** (1,225,330)
Toss up race	7,728,999*** (1,369,665)	7,680,393*** (1,406,434)	7,892,161 (1,288,164)
Opposing media spending	0.51*** (0.05)	0.51*** (0.05)	0.47*** (0.05)
Incumbent candidate	2,126,536** (800,092)	2,133,581* (826,373)	1,277,313 (774,029)
Republican candidate	3,291,361*** (689,290)	3,004,249** (953,166)	2,970,401*** (649,178)
Independent candidate	-2,790,606 (2,166,118)	—	-3622125 <sup>+</sup> (2,045,243)
Republican × Candidate media	—	0.05 (0.13)	—
Size of media markets	-188 (362)	-150 (362)	-193 (340)
2010	-3,326,123*** (852,454)	-3,252,722*** (859,838)	-454,179 (1,165,523)
2012	-1,866,379* (809,368)	-2,003,126* (824,683)	1,992,458 <sup>+</sup> (1,141,018)
Intercept	-3,598,041** (1,056,047)	-3,459,174** (1,092,771)	-5,424,765*** (1,115,598)
Uncensored observations	143	142	143
Left-censored observations	44	40	44
$\chi^2$	260.25***	257.43***	279.76***

*Standard errors in parentheses*<sup>+</sup>  $p < .10$ , \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$ , two-tailed tests

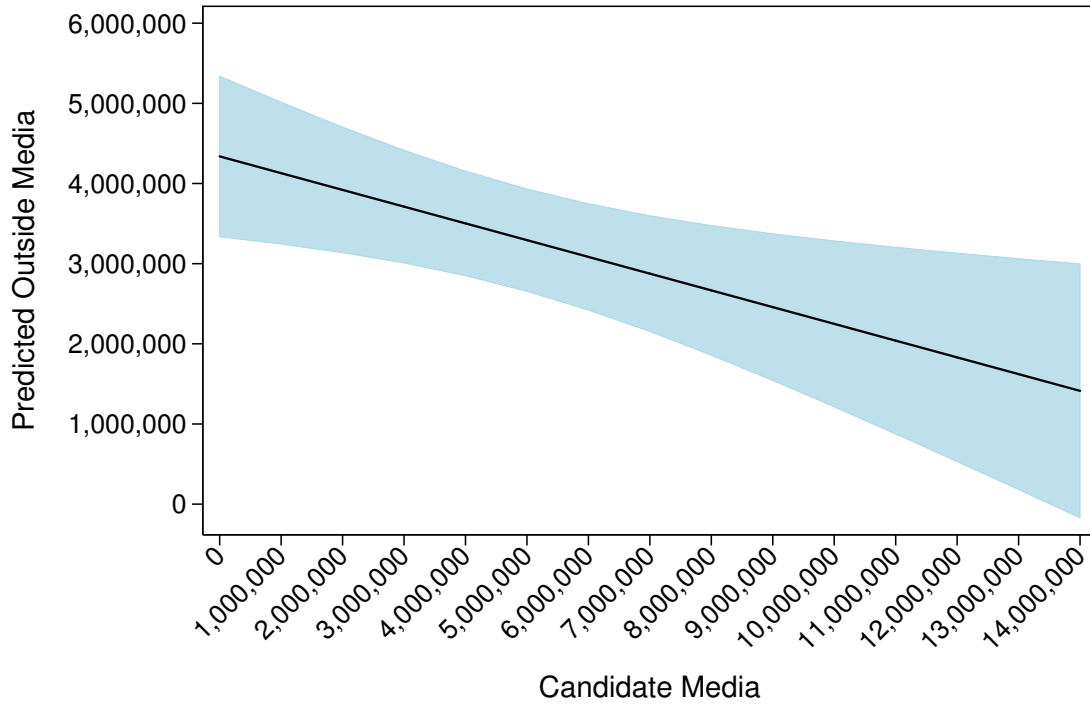


Figure 3.2: Marginal Effects of Candidate Media Spending

pooled model is shown in Figure 3.2. Holding other factors constant, one standard deviation less in candidate media spending (\$4,975,101) is associated with \$1,039,503 more in media spending by outside groups.

The intensity of the race has the expected strong association with outside spending. Each of the four dummy variables for the included categories of race competitiveness are significant, and each has a stronger effect as they move farther from a non-competitive race. More intuitively, the marginal effects graphed in Figure 3.3 show the effect of increasingly competitive contests on outside group media spending in that race. The association is roughly linear, with outside spending increasing about \$2 million for each category of competitiveness.



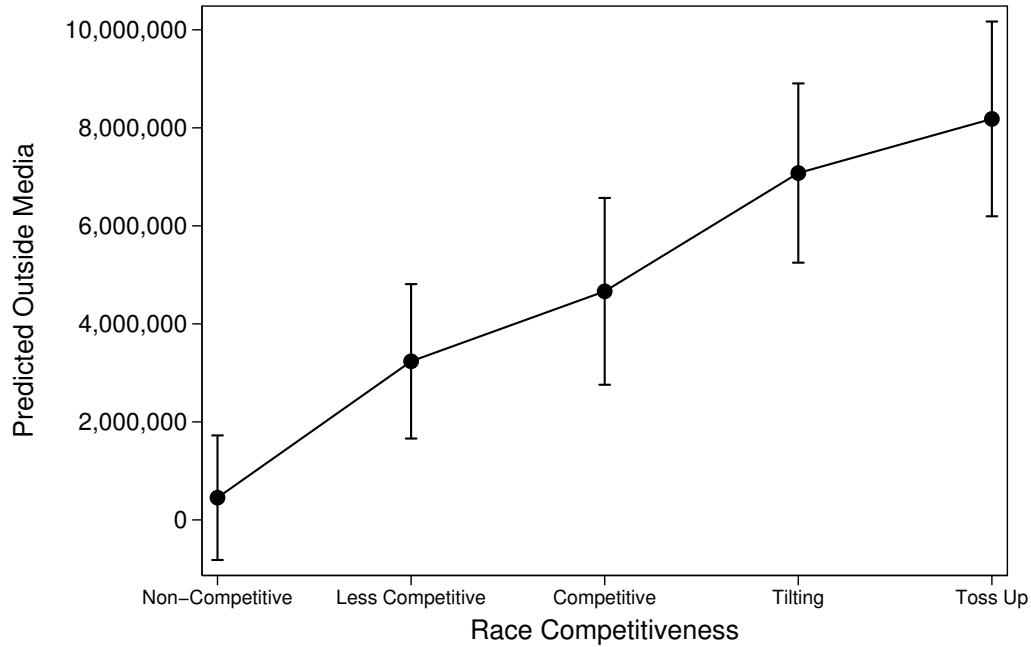


Figure 3.3: Marginal Effects of Race Competitiveness

Several other control variables also had significant effects in the anticipated direction. Media spending by the opposing side is associated with greater media spending by supporting outside groups. In addition, incumbents have significantly more support from outside media. Just as incumbents are able to attract more interest group donations, they they also benefit from more outside media support than challengers. The size of the media markets in each race did not have a relationship with outside media spending levels, however. Senate races occurring where the cost of media buys is higher are not associated with greater outside spending. Outside groups will spend just as heavily on media in Iowa as in New Jersey if the state of the race and the supported candidate's finances demand it.

As expected, Republicans have also enjoyed greater support than Democrats

from the current system of independent expenditures. Republican candidates receive \$2,247,315 more in outside media support on average than Democratic candidates (marginal effect calculated from base model). Moving beyond this main effect, the partisan model interacts partisanship with supporting attacks (for simplicity the 5 independent candidates were dropped from this model). The results of the interaction model demonstrate that the relationship between outside and candidate media spending is nearly the same in both Democratic and Republican campaigns. First, the coefficient for candidate media spending is nearly the same in the base model (-0.21) as in the interactive model (-0.23), the latter which we can interpret as the association between candidate media and outside media among Democratic campaigns. Second and more formally, a Wald test of this interaction finds that it is not significant ( $F = 0.16$ ,  $p = .69$ ), meaning that there is no statistically significant difference in the inverse spending pattern between outside groups and candidates, whether the campaign is Democrat or Republican.

The relationship between candidate media expenditures and outside group media spending by year are highly variable across years. The coefficients have the expected negative sign in both 2010 and 2012, but the relationship is actually positive in 2014. If any one year would have been expected to be positive, it should have been 2010 before outside groups and candidates had become accustomed to this new campaign environment. While each single election year offers only a small sample of races where there is significant outside group activity, the positive result in 2014 suggests that this relationship between candidate and outside media spending may still be evolving in unexpected ways.

## Issue-Based Groups

The second hypothesis predicts that issue-based independent groups will be less sensitive to purely electoral considerations than parties or party-adjacent independent groups. To evaluate this hypothesis an additional set of models is estimated of outside spending separately for each major category of outside group. The models estimated in Table 3.5 are similar to the main model, except that the dependent variable for each is media spending by parties, party adjacent groups, and issue based groups, respectively. A fourth model for single candidate groups is not estimated since these groups account for only a tiny fraction of outside group activity in Senate campaigns.

Issue based group spending, unlike parties and party-adjacent groups, is insensitive to candidate spending. Coefficients for parties and party-adjacent groups are negative and significant, indicating that these groups allocate media dollars inversely to candidate media spending. But issue-based group media spending has no association with candidate spending.

Figure 3.4 displays the marginal effects of race competitiveness on outside spending by each type of outside group, estimating effects only for races where that group type made media expenditures in the campaign. Issue-based groups still direct more media spending to closer races, but the strength of the relationship between race competitiveness and media spending appears weaker for issue-based groups than for parties and party adjacent groups. Much of the difference lies in the lowest two categories of competitiveness. When issue-based groups spend in non-competitive and less competitive races, the model estimates that they support the candidates more robustly than parties or party-adjacent groups (and interestingly, parties are

Table 3.5: Outside Media Spending by Group Type, 2010–2014

Independent Variables	Parties	Party-Adjacent	Issue-Based
Candidate media spending	-0.20** (0.06)	-0.16** (0.05)	-0.04 (0.04)
Less competitive race	2,617,481** (929,757)	2,204,059** (634,514)	1,668,882** (516,392)
Competitive race	4,312,750*** (998,776)	3,734,642*** (752,097)	2,081,809** (654,240)
Tilting race	6,708,021*** (1,024,299)	3,988,667*** (773,545)	2,506,849*** (659,575)
Toss up race	6,327,151*** (1,048,099)	4,491,569*** (802,299)	2,649,140*** (704,444)
Opposing media spending	0.18*** (0.03)	0.20*** (0.03)	0.19*** (0.03)
Incumbent candidate	564,091 ( 598,621)	550,496 (507,614)	616,311 (417,015)
Republican candidate	-980,658* (478,144)	1,678,102*** (408,052)	2,037,848*** (360,120)
Independent candidate	-4,212,834** (1,549,938)	-1,246,235 (1,213,486)	-772,148 (1,092,922)
Size of media markets	-235 (410)	-176 (240)	114 (184)
2010	-824,513 (667,144)	-2,042,278*** (533,524)	-1,158,394** (440,335)
2012	-82,650 (595,232)	-365,409 (474,103)	-1,081,890** (418,475)
Intercept	-3,877,167*** (1,001,737)	-3,240,740*** (674,005.5)	-2,351,587*** (565,895.7)
Uncensored observations	64	99	134
Left-censored observations	123	99	53
$\chi^2$	199.99***	212.05***	196.91***

*Standard errors in parentheses*\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$ , two-tailed tests

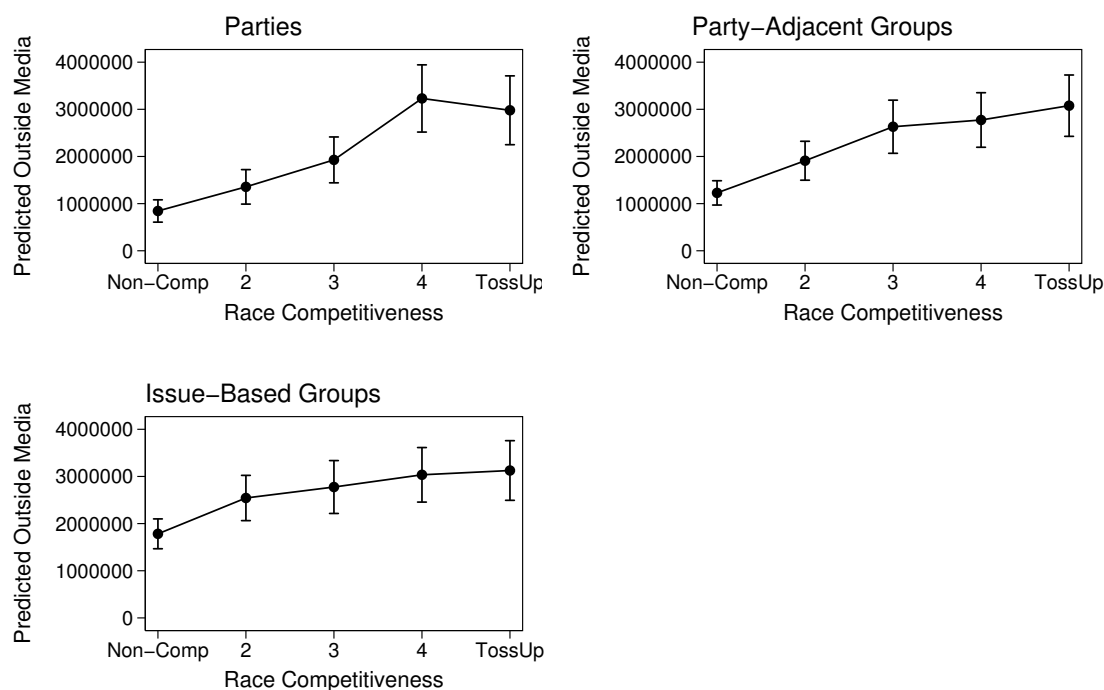


Figure 3.4: Marginal Effects of Race Competitiveness by Group Type

predicted to spend more media dollars in tilting races instead of up races).

The relationship between issue-based group spending and opposing group spending is no different than the association between party and party-adjacent groups and opposing spending. Media spending from all three group types have an equally strong positive association with the media spending from the opposing side of a campaign.

Several coefficients in the second set of models reflect the differences in how outside activity has evolved over time and is different between the parties. The dummy variables for year illustrate that party spending over time has remained mostly stable, while party-adjacent and issue-based media spending has risen signifi-

cantly. The estimates for the effect of Republican candidates reflect that Democrats tend to support their candidates through formal party groups and Republicans tend to use party-adjacent independent groups more heavily.

### 3.4 Conclusion

Ample prior research has documented that party resources are rational and mostly flow to the closest contests. When the era of super PACs began in 2010 it carried the risk that bringing in new actors would disrupt the distribution of resources. This chapter has produced several findings to show that most outside groups behave in a strategic seat-maximizing fashion and issue-based independent groups have modest but important differences in their allocation decisions.

Outside money in the aggregate rationally pursues majorities and outside money is well-informed. Seat-maximizing resource allocation is often more complex than simply funneling funds to close contests; it includes an inverse association with candidate media spending within similarly competitive races, though importantly this relationship did not hold in the 2014 election year which featured the highest levels of outside spending. The changes in the control over the distribution of campaign resources that occurred in the wake of the *Citizens United* and *Speechnow.org* decisions have not created a chaotic system of financing Senate contests, though these results suggest that the equilibrium in this new system has not yet been reached.

Support for this hypothesis does not, by itself, prove a causal relationship where lower candidate media spending causes higher outside spending. However, the opposite direction of causation in this relationship is far less likely: that candidates reduce media spending when outside groups spend on their behalf. Candidates in

competitive races almost always burn through all of their available cash and direct more of their money towards mass media, not less. The candidates are running up against ceilings on their expenditures, not holding back on media.

The findings here suggest that issue-based groups can best be described as allies but not full partners. These groups are still sensitive to the competitiveness of the contests, since their spending can only make a difference towards replacing policy opponents and rescuing policy allies where the contest is in doubt. In addition, most issues are well sorted between the parties. When issues are so well aligned with the parties the replacement strategy of an interest group is very similar to the seat maximization strategy of parties. But the association between their media spending and race competitiveness is weaker than media spending by other actors. Furthermore, unlike the formal parties and party-adjacent groups, issue-based groups do not allocate their media resources among similarly competitive contests to compensate for candidates who need more assistance.

Overall the share of media spending by parties has steadily declined in the last three election cycles, while party-adjacent groups have filled in the gaps. These independent groups also behave as seat-maximizers, and thus the proportion of outside money that is purely pursuing legislative majorities has remained stable in the first three elections since 2010. Democrats tend to receive more support through formal party groups and Republicans are more likely to receive support from party-adjacent groups, so this change has affected Republican campaigns more than Democratic campaigns.

Finally, the level of sophistication in outside group support should be noted. Candidate media spending is publicly available so there is no reason to think that

anything about the behavior described here violates FEC rules about coordination between candidates and expenditure-only groups. However, these patterns of support demonstrate the closeness of the relationship between outside actors and candidates.



## Chapter 4

# Compensatory Attack in Congressional Campaigns

The previous chapter demonstrated how outside groups compensate for candidates' budget shortfalls across races and pursue a seat-maximizing strategy consistent with what we expect from parties. This chapter examines whether campaign actors also engage in compensatory behavior within individual races on the tone of campaign advertising.

This chapter posits that the various actors within party networks engage in a compensatory style of cooperation by dividing of labor of attack advertising. Outside groups' advertising on behalf of candidates primarily attacks opponents and candidates reduce the proportion of their own advertising devoted to attack when they receive this support. This division of labor allows candidates to reduce attacks which carry the risk of public backlash and instead run more positive, self-promoting advertising. In addition, many outside groups have secondary objectives beyond simply winning the election, nor are these groups directly accountable to voters. Because of these features of outside groups, their attack advertising may be different in style from candidates' attacks on opponents.

## 4.1 The Risk and Reward of Attack Advertising

In any campaign advertisement the sponsor chooses to air attack messaging about the opponent, advocacy messaging about the supported candidate, and most often a combination of both.<sup>1</sup> While candidates may profess to prefer advocating for themselves, campaign professionals are confident that attack advertising works (Abbe et al. 2001; Kern 1989; Theilmann and Wilhite 1998). Political science has offered some support for this view, finding that under certain conditions attack advertising can affect vote choice (Ansolabehere and Iyengar 1995; Fridkin and Kenney 2011; Mattes and Redlawsk 2014; but for a dissenting assessment see Lau, Sigelman, and Rovner 2007). Attack advertising may have greater persuasive power than advocacy because individuals tend to give greater attention to negative information (Baumeister et al. 2001), and individuals are more likely to recall and use negative information when evaluating candidates (Lau 1985). Given these features, attack advertising is a very appealing tool for campaigns.

Campaigns are most likely to attack opponents when electoral success is threatened. As a race gets more competitive candidates are increasingly willing to attack their opponent, and when candidates are lagging behind their opponent they are more likely to engage in attacks (Damore 2002; Kahn and Kenney 1999; Lau and Pomper 2004; Theilmann and Wilhite 1998). Challengers have an incentive to attack incumbents in order to redefine the officeholder and erode his/her support (Geer 2006; Lau, Sigelman, and Rovner 2007; Kahn and Kenney 1999; Tinkham and Weaver-Lariscy 1995), while incumbents are incentivized to rely on more advocacy

---

<sup>1</sup>Following Lau and Pomper (2004), I avoid using the terms “negative” and “positive” to describe campaign advertising tone since these terms carry additional normative implications and the connotation that all attack advertising is unfair or out of bounds.

messages to promote their accomplishments in office (Goldstein et al. 2001). Attack advertising can also be retaliatory, where candidates attack as a response to opponent attacks (Ansolabehere and Iyengar 1995; Damore 2002; Haynes and Rhine 1998; Lau and Pomper 2004). Finally, multi-candidate contests feature less attack advertising. In a multi-candidate race eroding support for one candidate may push those voters to another opponent, so the calculus for a candidate in deciding to attack is more complex and has a less clear payoff (Hansen and Pedersen 2008; Walter 2014).

Campaigns also have disincentives to attack opponents. First, attack advertising carries potential risk for the sponsor. Attacks might be considered out of bounds, unfair, or unacceptable by voters. Numerous studies have found a backlash effect from attack advertising, where viewers of attack ads lower their evaluations of the attacker instead of the target of the message (Allen and Burrell 2002; Brooks and Murov 2012; Dowling and Wichowsky 2015; Garramone 1985; Garramone and Smith 1984; Lau, Sigelman, and Rovner 2007). Second, campaigns must still balance multiple communications objectives in their advertising. Besides attacking opponents, campaigns seek to define their own candidates in favorable terms to voters. Advocacy messages frame the candidate in the preferred context and reduce voters' uncertainty about candidates (Alvarez 1997; Alvarez and Franklin 1994; Shea and Burton 2006). Advertising time spent attacking the opponent is time not spent making the case for the supported candidate, so campaigns should seek a balance of both attack and advocacy messages in the advertising mix.

## 4.2 Hypotheses

Attack advertising can be a double-edged sword for candidates, but the expanded role of outside campaign actors offers candidates an opportunity to benefit from attacks on opponents without paying a price for them. A network of cooperative actors should be able to work together in a division of labor of attack and advocacy messages. Furthermore, outside groups often have broader objectives and are less accountable to voters so they may attack opponents in different ways, in particular by relying more or less on personal or policy-based attacks. If the type of attacks made by outside groups is systematically different than attacks by candidates, then an increasing role for outside groups will alter the tone of advertising in campaigns in other ways beyond the mix of attack and advocacy.

Many voters do not connect candidates to attack advertising by outside groups (Dowling and Wichowsky 2015). Because of this disconnect, candidates can escape backlash from attacks if the attack is made by outside groups on behalf of the candidate instead of by the candidate's own committee (Brooks and Murov 2012; Dowling and Wichowsky 2013; Weber, Dunaway, and Johnson 2012). Because attack messages are easier than advocacy messages for outside groups to create, and because the main risk of attack, backlash against the candidate, is diminished when the attacks are carried by outside groups, campaign actors have an incentive to divide the labor of attack and advocacy. Candidates should therefore devote a smaller proportion of their own advertising to attacking opponents when outside groups run more attack advertising on their behalf.

Advertising totals in the 2010 Kentucky Senate race, shown in Figure 4.1, illustrate how candidates can adjust their advertising when they anticipate that out-

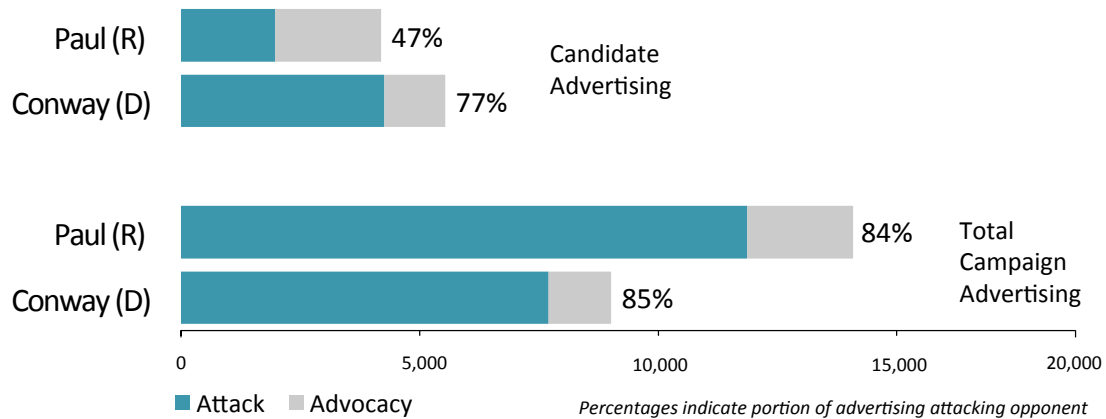


Figure 4.1: Portion of Ad Volume Devoted to Attack, Kentucky Senate 2010

siders will carry the negative. The top half of the figure displays the volume of advertising and proportion of attack and advocacy by the candidates, while the bottom half of the figure displays the total advertising for each campaign, that is, the total of candidate advertising plus all advertising supporting that candidate by outside groups (the methods for calculating these totals is described in the next section). First for the candidates, Rand Paul appeared to run a mostly positive campaign – he attacked Conway with 47% of his advertising while Conway attacked him with 77% of his ad volume. However, moving down to the bottom half of the figure we see that including the outside group support into the total advertising changes this picture. Both campaigns devoted nearly identical proportions of advertising to attacking the opponent (84% and 85%, respectively).

This should be a broad pattern across legislative campaigns, and campaign actors should capitalize on the broad network of participants to divide the labor of attacking opponents. Recent studies of outside group advertising have shown that outsiders devote most of their messaging to attacking opponents (Fowler and Ridout

2012, 2014). Candidates should anticipate this from outside groups and devote a smaller proportion of their own advertising to attacking opponents when outside groups run more attack advertising on their behalf.

**Compensatory tone hypothesis:** As the volume of attack advertising by supporting outside groups increases, the proportion of candidate attack advertising decreases.

When outside groups carry greater responsibility for attacking opponents in campaigns this can affect the tone of the race. If outside groups insulate the candidate from backlash, outside groups may be more willing to run attacks on the personal characteristics of the opponent. Voters often state that they are comfortable with policy-based attacks but they dislike attack ads that are not about topics germane to the election (Kahn and Kenney 1999; Mattes and Redlawsk 2014), and many personal attacks are considered a distasteful tactic in campaign communications (Geer 2006). One of the more famous examples of a personal attack from an independent group gave rise to a specific term for a personal and probably untrue attack: “swift-boating” (Cogan and Kelso 2009, 334–335).

Campaign managers for candidates claim that they prefer campaign discourse that is issue-based and avoids personal attacks (Tokaji and Strause 2014), but outside groups might be more open to mounting personal attacks. Since outside groups should in theory be indifferent to public backlash (their organization is not on the ballot), outside groups could be more willing to mount personal attacks in their advertising. However, evidence of backlash was observed in Senate races in 1996 where

attack messages from the party caused voter backlash against the supported candidates (Jasperson and Fan 2002). Some backlash against a candidate is reasonable to expect when the outside support is from the party since many voters can draw a clear connection between candidates and parties. Independent groups, however, do not have an immediately obvious connection to the supported candidate. When campaign actors are less concerned about backlash they should be less reluctant to use personal attacks against opponents. Therefore, attack advertising by independent groups should be more likely than parties or candidates to be personal instead of policy-based attacks.

**Insulation hypothesis:** Independent group attack advertising will be more likely than candidates or parties to be based on opponents' personal characteristics.

However, there are also reasons to expect that outside groups are more policy-oriented in their attacks. Issue-based groups must answer to donors who have policy interests, and therefore will have an incentive to emphasize those policy positions in their attacks. Parties and other groups advertising in multiple races may use broadly themed attacks that focus on the major issues of the election. Some groups with a national perspective find it efficient to use “cookie cutter” ads across numerous races at once. Identical ads across districts will be unlikely to address personal aspects of the opponents. These considerations suggest a rival hypothesis about outside group attacks:

**Outside agendas hypothesis:** Multi-race outside groups will be more likely than candidates to engage in policy-based attacks.

### 4.3 Data and Measurement

The campaign advertising data used here comes from the Wesleyan Media Project (WMP) for the 2010 and 2012 election cycles (Fowler, Franz, and Ridout 2014, 2015). The WMP captures and codes all airings of political advertisements on broadcast television in all 210 media markets in the United States. The analyses in this chapter include the campaign advertising by all campaign actors in federal legislative races, confined in scope to general election activity. In all, 2,382,138 airings of political advertisements by 751 House and Senate candidates and 232 outside groups are included.

Measuring campaign advertising by the frequency of airings is a common choice, but assuming all airings are of equal importance may not be valid. For example, an airing that occurs during the 6 o'clock news in a district's largest media market versus another airing that occurs during daytime programming in a secondary media market are quite different in terms of both cost and reach (for related discussions of advertising measurement, see Freedman and Goldstein 1999; Jamieson, Waldman, and Sherr 2000; and Shaw 1999).

To account for differences in the reach of separate airings, this project merges broadcast television ratings data from Nielsen with the WMP datasets to weight the advertising volume in terms of each ad airing's potential audience. Each airing was expressed as the size of the media market (in thousands of television households) times the estimated average broadcast television viewership in the daypart when the ad aired (see Appendix A for a more detailed description of this process and Appendix B for an evaluation of the measure). For example, an ad in 2012 airing in the Miami market (1,621,130 television households) during early news (estimated



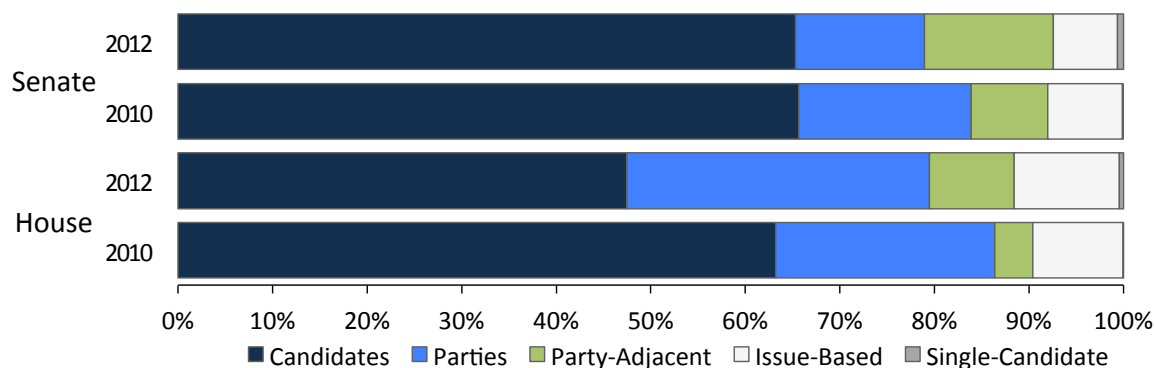


Figure 4.2: Relative Advertising Volume by Actor

23.4% of homes watching local television during this daypart) has a value of 379.34 ( $1621.13 \times .234 = 379.34$ ) while another ad airing in the Jacksonville market (659,170 television households) during late news (estimated 18.4% of homes viewing local television during this daypart) has a value of 121.29 ( $659.17 \times .184 = 121.29$ ). The cardinal values of this measure for each airing do not represent the true audiences of individual ads but using these values as a measure of advertising volume captures the relative differences between audience sizes for spots in different markets and different dayparts.

Using these values of advertising volume, the relative size of each campaign actor is shown in Figure 4.2. Outside groups were responsible for about one third of the total advertising volume, except in House races in 2012, where outside groups were the sponsor of over half of the ads in their races. In the 2012 House contests it was the parties that expanded their role, running one-third of the advertising volume in those races. Single candidate groups, while prominent in presidential campaigns, were a trivial factor in 2012 legislative campaigns and virtually nonexistent in 2010. The overall picture is consistent with the totals in Chapters 2 and 3: outside adver-

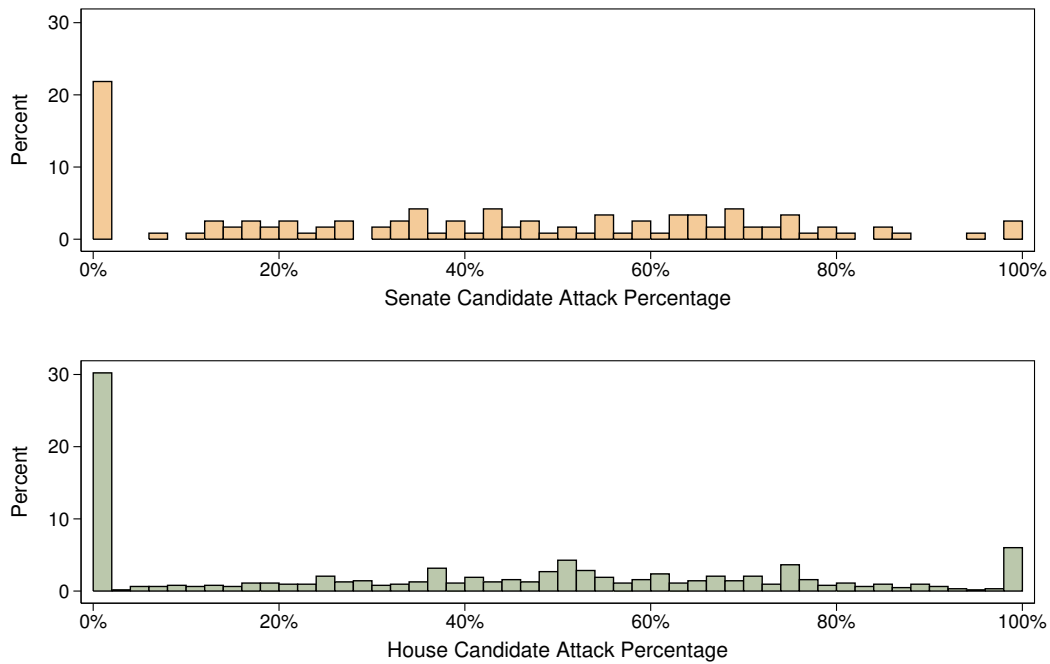


Figure 4.3: Percentage of Candidate Advertising Attacking Opponents

tisers are major players in campaigns, and parties are usually the largest advertisers among outside groups.

A percentage of advertising devoted to attack of the opponent versus advocacy for the preferred candidate was calculated for each campaign actor in each campaign. The WMP codes each advertisement as a contrast, promote, or attack spot. To simplify this comparison, each airing was coded where attack spots = 1, promote spots = 0, and contrast spots were assigned middle values based on the proportion of the ad promoting versus attacking, as reported by WMP. Each airing's potential audience was multiplied by this score to provide a sum of attack and advocacy. The sum of attack divided by the sum of all advertising yielded the attack percentage for

Table 4.1: Percentage of Advertising Attacking Opponents

	Senate		House	
	2010	2012	2010	2012
Candidates	50%	40%	58%	44%
Parties	82%	84%	94%	89%
Party-Adjacent Groups	97%	92%	94%	93%
Issue-Based Groups	90%	87%	92%	77%
Total Advertising for Campaign	63%	57%	71%	67%

*Single candidate groups are excluded because of their trivial advertising volume*

each campaign actor’s advertising. The attack percentage indicates the proportion of advertising volume devoted to attack versus advocacy.

Candidates had diverse mixes of advertising tone, shown in Figure 4.3. Since so many legislative seats are safe in any election, it is no surprise that many candidates aired no attack messages at all in their television campaigns, resulting in a high frequency of candidates airing no attacks at all.<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, 34 candidates in House races devoted all of their advertising to attacking their opponents. Within these extremes, however, the distribution of attack/advocacy mixes by candidates was highly variable.

Recent studies of outside group advertising have shown that outside groups devote much more of their messaging to attacking opponents (Fowler and Ridout 2012), and the attack percentages for each type of campaign actor shown in Table 4.1 are consistent with these previous findings. There is some variation between groups and election years, but broadly speaking candidates averaged about 45% – 50% of advertising devoted to attack while outside groups averaged about 85% – 90% of

<sup>2</sup>These candidates did have any attacks in their advertising despite having an opponent, in other words, none of the campaigns in this sample were unopposed.

Table 4.2: Advertising Volume by Competitiveness

	Senate		House	
	Candidates	Outsiders	Candidates	Outsiders
Toss Up	20%	29%	17%	33%
Tilting	29%	41%	16%	22%
Competitive	24%	24%	19%	27%
Less Competitive	7%	4%	18%	10%
Non-Competitive	20%	1%	29%	8%

*Column percents*

advertising devoted to attack. In addition, the percentage of advertising volume devoted to attacks was slightly lower for many groups in 2012, a presidential election year.

This difference in advertising tone between campaign actors is mainly due to two factors. First is outside groups' preference for attacking opposing candidates instead of advocating for supported candidates. Second, candidates run more ads in safe races where there is little incentive to attack. Table 4.2 shows the volume of advertising by candidates and outside groups across races of different levels of competitiveness. In Senate races, 73% of candidate advertising occurred in races in the top three categories of competitiveness while 95% of outside group ads ran in these contests. In the House, 52% of candidate advertising volume ran in races in the top three categories of competitiveness compared to 82% of outside group ads in these closer contests. Candidate advertising relative to outsider advertising is skewed towards safe races where they are more likely to run only advocacy spots.

## 4.4 Analyses

### Compensatory Attack

The compensatory attack hypothesis expects that the proportion of candidate advertising devoted to attack will have a negative association with the volume of outside group supporting attacks. To empirically test this expectation pooled, cross-sectional models predicting the percentage of a candidate’s advertising volume attacking opponents are estimated separately for Senate and House campaigns. The unit of analysis for the models is each campaign where the candidate aired any television advertising (Senate N=119; House N=632).<sup>3</sup>

Whereas the previous chapter modeled outside group activity, the dependent variable in these models is the percentage of candidate advertising devoted to attack. Candidates, not outside groups, are the more unconstrained actor in terms of campaign tone. The level of outside group media, as shown in Chapter 3, is guided by considerations of competition and candidate budget strength. And as shown in Table 4.1, when outside groups advertise in a race there is very little variation in ad tone – it is almost entirely attack advertising. If campaign actors compensate for one another on ad tone, we should most clearly observe the change in candidate advertising.

The dependent variable is modeled as a function of several variables listed in

---

<sup>3</sup>Not included in the Senate sample are the 2010 NY Senate races since it proved too difficult to reliably account for which candidate was supported by a given advertisement. Not included in the House sample are the 2010 Republican campaigns in IL-11 and MN-8 and the 2012 Republican campaign in NC-7. These three candidates ran just a handful of television spots. With so little of their own advertising, there was insufficient “room” for these candidates to alter their mix of tone and inflated supporting attack values resulted from the candidates’ paltry advertising volumes. To ensure that the results were unaffected by dropping these cases, the model was estimated with their inclusion and the results were almost entirely unaffected.

Table 4.3: Summary Statistics for Models of Attack Percentage

	Senate				House			
	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min.	Max.	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min.	Max.
Dependent Var:								
Candidate attack pct.	0.38	0.29	0	1	0.38	0.33	0	1
Independent Vars:								
Supporting attacks	0.54	0.92	0	4.58	0.69	1.53	0	11.53
Race rating		(for the distribution see Table A.2, Appendix)						
Opposing attacks	1.09	1.46	0	8.01	1.15	1.88	0	16.11
Republican	50%	—	0	1	51%	—	0	1
Incumbent candidate	30%	—	0	1	47%	—	0	1
Challenger candidate	27%	—	0	1	36%	—	0	1
Open seat candidate	43%	—	0	1	17%	—	0	1
Three-way race	9%	—	0	1	—	—	—	—
2012	53%	—	0	1	50%	—	0	1
		N=119				N=632		

Table 4.3. The main independent variable of interest, *supporting attack*, is measured as the total volume of attacks on behalf of the candidate divided by the candidate’s total advertising volume. For example, Jack Conway the Democratic Senate candidate in Kentucky in 2010 had a total advertising volume value of 442,586 and outside groups supported his campaign with a volume of 274,855 attacks on his opponent. The resulting supporting attack ratio is 0.62 ( $\frac{274,855}{442,586} = 0.62$ ). Expressing supporting attacks as a ratio of the candidate’s advertising volume accounts for varying sizes of campaigns, since candidates should only be interested in adjusting the advertising mix when the outside support is at a volume that is meaningful in their race.

To isolate the independent effect of supporting outside attacks on a candidate’s attack percentage the model must also account for the other major determinants of a candidate’s choice to attack the opponent. The most important determinant is the state of the race, or the closeness of the campaign and the candidate’s prospects for winning, represented by the Rothenberg race ratings. The overall re-

lationship between the strategic context of the race and a candidate's percentage of attack should be curvilinear: candidates in closer races will be more likely to attack the opponent while safe and hopeless campaigns will attack less. Furthermore, candidates who are behind should be more likely to attack than candidates who are ahead. Folding the scale would fail to account for this second effect. Therefore, the Rothenberg ratings are included in the models as a set of eight dummy variables with the category 1 = *safe seat* omitted.

The *opposing attacks* directed against a candidate are measured as the total advertising volume attacking the candidate from all actors divided by the total volume of the candidate's own advertising. The status of the candidates as *incumbents*, *challengers*, or in *open* contests is included in the model as two dummy variables (the omitted category is incumbent). In a handful of Senate contests a viable independent candidate (a candidate who eventually received 15% or more of the total vote) was also in the race. Since attacking opponents is not as beneficial of a strategy in a multi-candidate contest than in a two-way contest, a dummy variable for candidates running in a *three-way race* is included in the Senate model. Finally, because this is a pooled sample of 2010 and 2012 races an indicator for the year of the election is included in the models as a dummy variable for *2012*.

A fractional logit model is used because the dependent variable is a percentage. This is a generalized linear model with a binomial distribution and a logit link. This form is suited for a fractional response variable since it allows the dependent variable to take on any value between 0 and 1, including the boundary values, and can accommodate the large portion of zeros and ones in the dependent variable (Papke and Wooldridge 1996). Two models are estimated, separately for Senate and

House campaigns. The basic model to measure the main effect of supporting outside attacks on candidates' attack percentage can be written as follows:

$$E(candattack_i) = \Lambda(\beta_0 + \beta_1 supattack_i + \sum_{j=2}^9 \beta_j rating_i + \beta_{10} oppattack_i + \beta_{11} challenger_i + \beta_{12} open_i + \beta_{13} threeway_i + \beta_{14} 2012_i) \quad (4.1)$$

The estimates from the models are shown in Table 4.4. Variables for the state of the race have the anticipated effects on candidate attacks. To best illustrate this relationship, marginal effects on the predicted candidate attack percentage for each category of competitiveness are shown in Figure 4.4.<sup>4</sup> As expected, the highest predicted proportions of attack advertising are for candidates somewhat behind in race, though the predicted percentages of attack are similar for all candidates within two categories of a toss up race. Safe candidates have the lowest predicted attack percentages, while their opponents (hopeless candidates) are predicted to run a moderate amount of attacks.

A greater volume of attack from the opponent is associated with a greater share of the candidate's advertising going towards attack, though the effect is significant only in a one-tailed test in the Senate sample. No significant differences in the level of attack are observed between incumbents, challengers, and open seat candidates. The independent effect of running in a three-way race, however, is strongly negative in Senate contests. When there are three viable candidates, the candidates in those races run much less attack advertising. House candidates but not Senate

---

<sup>4</sup>All marginal effects in this study are calculated with the continuous variables held constant at their means and categorical variables at their mode.



Table 4.4: Fractional Logit Models of Candidate Attack Percentage

Independent Variables	Base Model		Partisan Model	
	Senate	House	Senate	House
Supporting attacks	-.422*	-.138**	-.751*	-.343***
	(.181)	(.056)	(.361)	(.080)
Republican	—	—	.340	-.065
			(.311)	(.132)
Republican $\times$ supporting attacks	—	—	.275	.246**
			(.291)	(.085)
Nearly safe seat (2)	2.337***	1.405***	2.448***	1.414***
	(.616)	(.215)	(.646)	(.214)
(3)	2.810***	1.912***	3.026***	1.982***
	(.538)	(.255)	(.539)	(.256)
(4)	2.926***	1.717***	2.866***	1.729***
	(.539)	(.219)	(.568)	(.224)
Toss Up (5)	2.811***	1.792***	2.949***	1.878***
	(.094)	(.211)	(.623)	(.216)
(6)	2.990***	1.854***	3.266***	2.004***
	(.580)	(.243)	(.625)	(.249)
(7)	2.380***	2.111***	2.095**	2.169***
	(.671)	(.254)	(.676)	(.263)
(8)	2.072***	1.499***	2.212***	1.472***
	(.543)	(.247)	(.567)	(.252)
Hopeless candidacy (9)	2.002*	1.032***	2.179**	1.009***
	(.616)	(.216)	(.638)	(.226)
Opposing attacks	.202 <sup>+</sup>	.123**	.290 <sup>+</sup>	.119**
	(.125)	(.043)	(.152)	(.043)
Challenging candidate	.055	.172	-.328	.183
	(.358)	(.143)	(.412)	(.153)
Open seat candidate	-.393	-.242	-.540	-.237
	(.279)	(.173)	(.330)	(.173)
Three-way race	-1.326***	—	—	—
	(.344)			
2012	.181	-.552***	.237	-.516***
	(.219)	(.109)	(.226)	(.109)
Intercept	-2.378***	-1.412	-2.585***	-1.386***
	(.219)	(.150)	(.489)	(.166)
N	119	632	115	632
BIC	-466.33	-3721.24	-438.06	-3711.26
Log Pseudo-Likelihood	-50.79	-290.24	-49.80	-288.79

*Standard errors in parentheses*<sup>+</sup> $p < .10$ , \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$ , two-tailed tests

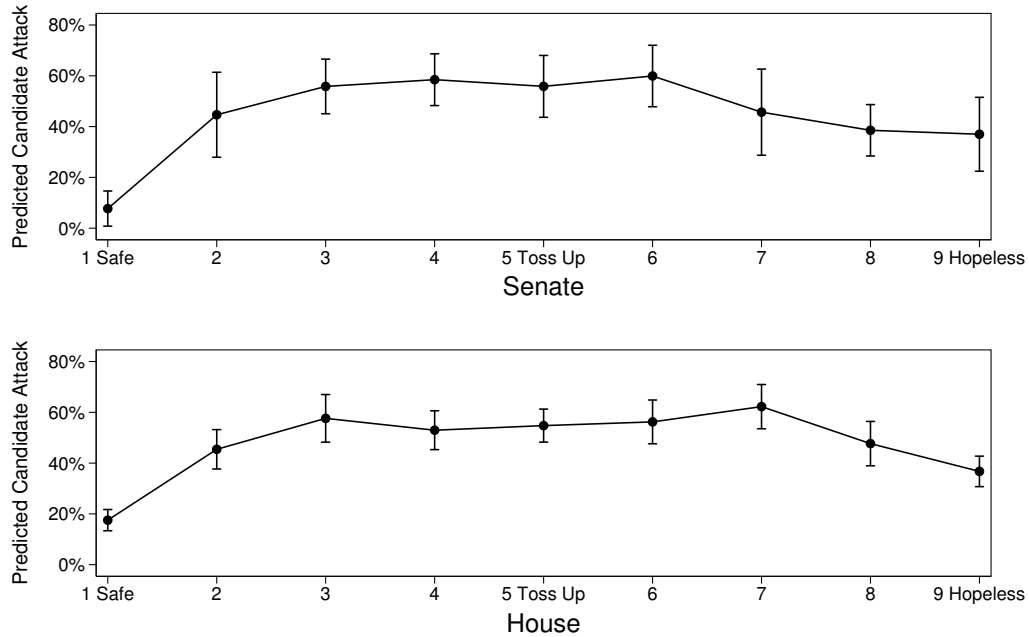


Figure 4.4: Marginal Effects of the State of the Race

candidates were much less likely to attack in 2012, perhaps because this was a redistricting year and even incumbents needed to introduce themselves to new electorates.

After controlling for these factors, the results of the models support the compensatory tone hypothesis. The main effects calculated in the base model show that a greater volume of supporting attacks from outside groups is negatively associated with the percentage of attack advertising from the candidate, in both Senate and House races. As outside groups attack more, candidates attack less.

The marginal effects of outside group attacks on the candidate's mix of attack and advocacy are shown in Figure 4.5. The base model predicts that in Senate contests an increase of one standard deviation in the supporting attack ratio results in a decrease of candidate attacks of 8.3 percentage points. In House races the effect

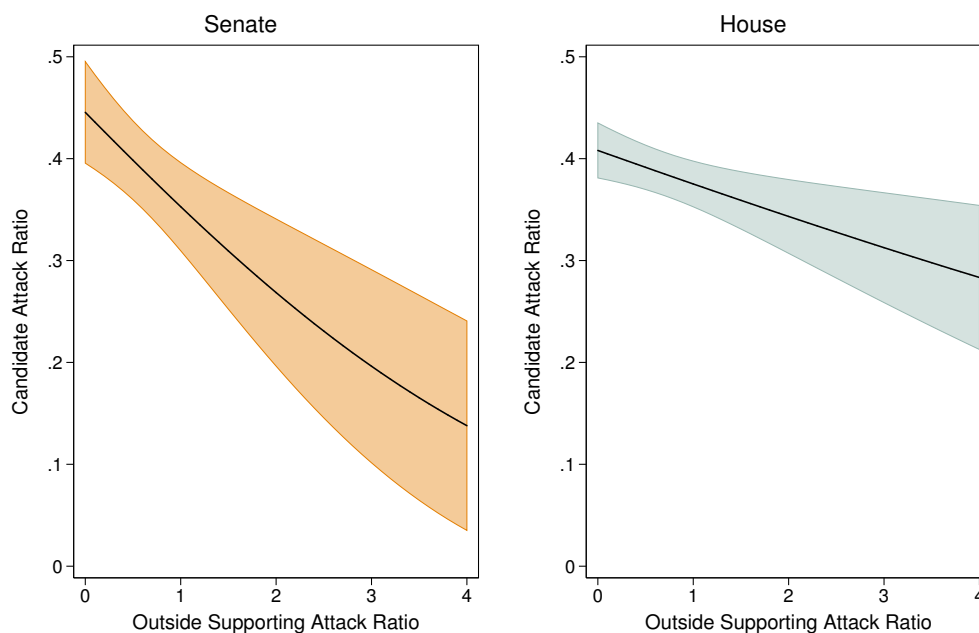


Figure 4.5: Marginal Effects of Supporting Attacks from Outside Groups

is smaller. An increase of one standard deviation in the supporting attack ratio in House contests results in a decrease of candidate attacks of 4.0 percentage points.<sup>5</sup>

To move beyond these main effects a second set of models interact partisanship with supporting attacks. In these models the difference in the relationship between supporting attacks and candidate attacks is borderline significant in the Senate sample ( $F = 7.71, p = .052$ ) and more clearly significant in the House sample ( $F = 19.41, p < .001$ ). Margins calculated from the interactive models show that the compensatory relationship in attack advertising is stronger among Democratic campaigns than among Republican campaigns (see Fig. 4.6). In the Senate, Demo-

---

<sup>5</sup>One standard deviation change of supporting attacks (Senate = 0.92; House = 1.53) starting from the variable's mean (Senate = 0.54; House = 0.69).

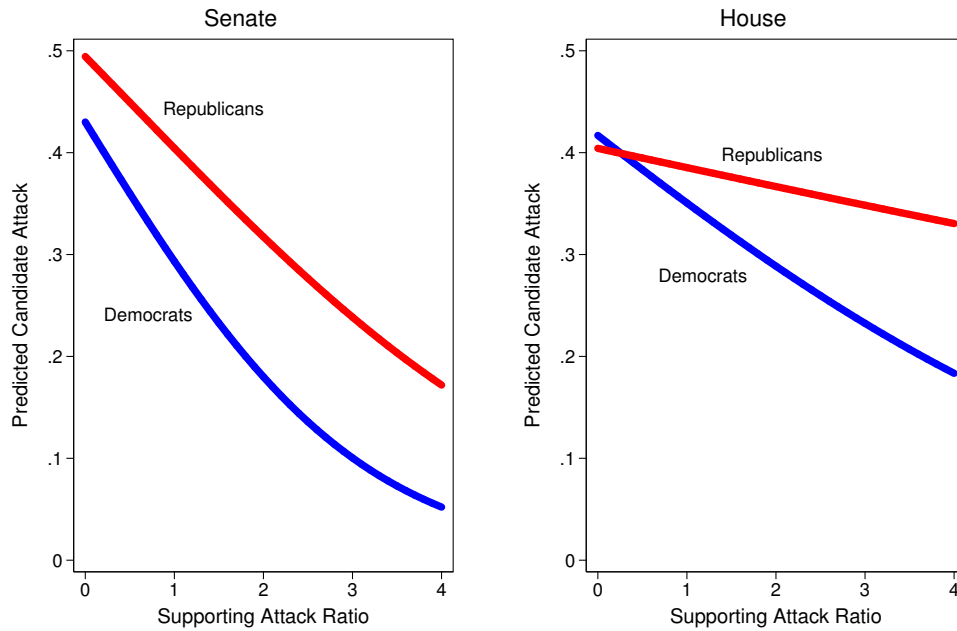


Figure 4.6: Marginal Effects of Supporting Attacks by Party

cratic candidates reduce their percentage of attacks by 11.7 points in response to one standard deviation increase in supporting attacks (moving from a supporting ratio of 0.54 to 1.46) while Republican candidates reduce their attack percentage by 8.2 points over the same range. In the House the difference is more stark. One standard deviation increase from the mean of supporting attacks (from 0.69 to 2.22) is associated with 9.5 points less attacks by Democrats versus 2.8 points less attacks by Republican candidates.

### Lagged Analysis

Is the reciprocal relationship between attack advertising by outside groups and supported candidates a result of cues and expectations between actors, or is this

a responsive and not explicitly cooperative relationship? Perhaps the associations are caused by a simpler process where candidates alter the mix of advertising tone in response to prior supporting attacks from outside groups. If campaign actors have solved their communication challenges and have accurate expectations of each others' advertising efforts in campaigns, timing should be irrelevant to a division of labor of attack. In other words, candidates should be able to adjust their percentage of attack based on both past and expected future advertising by supporting outside groups.

The previous pooled cross-sectional models allow us to observe the overall association between outside group attack advertising and candidates' total campaign advertising mix. But the WMP data records when each ad aired, so the advertising data can be structured as a time-series panel to examine how outside group attacks one week are associated with a candidate's attack percentage in following weeks and vice versa. To test for these potential relationships, the data is partitioned into weekly blocks and fixed effects time series models are estimated, shown in Table 4.5. The variables of *supporting attacks* and *opposing attacks* and *candidate attacks* are all included with both 1 and 2 week lags. Models are estimated both with candidate attacks as the dependent variable and with supporting attacks as the dependent variable in order to test if either outsiders or candidates respond in following weeks to supporting actors' attack advertising. The dependent variables remain on the right-hand side of both models with 1 and 2 week lags to account for autocorrelation.<sup>6</sup>

The results of both models show that the dependent variables are temporally

---

<sup>6</sup>These models measure intra-campaign variation of candidate attack on opponents. Variables present in the other models, i.e., race competitiveness, challenger or incumbent, party, and election cycle are not included since they are constant within each panel group (campaign).

Table 4.5: Fixed Effects Linear Models of Candidate Attack Percentage

Independent Variables	DV: Candidate Attack		DV: Supporting Attack	
	Senate	House	Senate	House
Supporting attacks $t-1$	.003 (.003)	.003 (.004)	1.965*** (.042)	.519*** (.024)
Supporting attacks $t-2$	-.001 (.005)	.003 (.005)	-2.170*** (.077)	-.135*** (.028)
Opposing attacks $t-1$	-.003 (.002)	.003 (.004)	-.243*** (.032)	.607*** (.022)
Opposing attacks $t-2$	.007* (.003)	-.007+ (.003)	.354*** (.050)	-.358*** (.025)
Candidate attacks $t-1$	.614*** (.036)	.567*** (.020)	-.021 (.508)	-.141 (.125)
Candidate attacks $t-2$	-.157*** (.034)	-.181*** (.019)	.129 (.481)	-.284* (.119)
Intercept	.244*** (.017)	.289*** (.009)	.656** (.239)	.253*** (.056)
N	822	2,547	822	2,547
Overall R <sup>2</sup>	.55	.58	.88	.68

*Standard errors in parentheses*

<sup>+</sup> $p < .10$ , \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$ , two-tailed tests

autocorrelated. That is, the candidate's proportion of attacks in previous weeks has a significant association with the candidate's attack percentage in the current week, and the volume of supporting attack advertising in a given week is strongly associated with the volume of supporting attacks in previous weeks.

If candidates react to supporting attacks in prior weeks, then the coefficients for *supporting attacks* <sub>$t-1$</sub>  and *supporting attacks* <sub>$t-2$</sub>  will have negative associations with the candidate attack percentage dependent variable (left two columns of Table 4.5). However, the results show no relationship between the percentage of candidate advertising devoted to attack in a given week and the volume of outside group supporting attacks in prior weeks. Going in the other direction, if outside groups reduce their volume of supporting attack in response to the supported candidates

airing more attack, then coefficients for *candidate attacks*<sub>t-1</sub> and *candidate attacks*<sub>t-2</sub> will have negative associations with the supporting attack ratio (right two columns of Table 4.5). Evidence for such a relationship is weak. The two-week lag for candidate attacks has a negative relationship in House races, but the relationship is positive and insignificant in Senate races, and one-week lags for candidate attacks have no significant relationship with supporting attacks in either House or Senate contests.

As discussed in Chapter 2, candidates learn of the support from outside groups before the supporting ads air and with irregular advance warning – sometimes days in advance and many times weeks or even months in advance. Over the entire campaign candidates attack opponents less as outside groups attack more, but there is little evidence for a temporal explanation for this phenomenon. Candidates do not appear to manage this division of labor by reacting to outside group advertising after it airs, nor is there strong evidence that outside groups tailor the volume of their attacks in response to candidate advertising tone in prior weeks. Instead, candidates and outside groups can plan their mix based on both past and anticipated future support. The reciprocal association between candidate and outsider attacks appears to be driven by information and expectations, not as reactions to prior advertising.

### **Type of Attack**

When outside groups take on a larger role of attack in a campaign, what impact does this have on the tone of advertising in the race? The insulation hypothesis expects that independent groups will be more likely to use personal attacks against opponents because they are less concerned about public backlash. The outside agendas hypothesis has the opposite expectation, that outside groups of all types (both

parties and independent groups) will be more policy-oriented in their attacks because of their national perspective and policy interests. A straightforward evaluation of these hypotheses is to compare the proportions of attack advertising by each group devoted to personal attacks versus policy-based attacks.

For these comparisons it is also necessary to differentiate both between the types of groups (candidates, parties, party-adjacent groups, and issue-based groups) and between the groups' organizational forms (i.e., super PACs and 501(c)s). Many 501(c) issue-based groups with undisclosed donors are authentic social welfare groups such as Sierra Club or the Humane Society, with members interested in advancing an issue more so than influencing elections. Party-adjacent dark money groups, however, generally organize as 501(c)s in order to offer their donors anonymity, e.g., Americans for Prosperity or Crossroads GPS. Among party-adjacent and issue-based independent groups the level of transparency may be associated both with their sensitivity to backlash and the authenticity of their commitment to a declared issue interest, and thus may be associated with the frequency of their use of personal attacks against candidates.

To create these subgroups donor transparency was classified as a dichotomous variable based on information from the Center for Responsive Politics ([openSecrets.org](http://openSecrets.org)) and the outside groups' own websites. Groups with fully disclosed donors were coded as *transparent* groups and groups with limited or completely undisclosed donors were coded as *dark* groups. Single candidate groups were not included in this analysis since they represented only a trivial amount of advertising in the 2010 and 2012 congressional elections.

Table 4.6 shows the percentage of attacks based on personal characteristics



Table 4.6: Percentage of Attacks on Personal Characteristics

	Senate	House
Candidates	30% (431,848)	28% (435,004)
Parties	27% (190,285)	21% (293,861)
Transparent Party-Adjacent Groups	16% (67,511)	18% (42,627)
Dark Party-Adjacent Groups	14% (85,477)	7% (29,747)
Transparent Issue-Based Groups	9% (45,518)	19% (36,491)
Dark Issue-Based Groups	8% (38,875)	11% (63,219)

*Total airings of ads with attack content in parentheses*

*Single candidate groups are excluded because of their trivial advertising volume*

from each category of actor. Because these percentages reflect the proportion of personal attacks in all attack ad airings by each actor (total attack ad airings are shown in parentheses), all differences are significant at  $p < .001$  in two-tailed proportions tests.

Candidates (30% Senate, 28% House) followed by parties (27% Senate, 21% House) were the most likely campaign actors to base their attacks on personal characteristics instead of policy considerations. Issue-based independent groups rarely made personal attacks (all issue-based groups combined 9% Senate, 14% House), but even party-adjacent groups both with disclosed and undisclosed donor support made mostly policy-based attacks against opponents when compared to candidates (all party-adjacent groups combined 15% Senate, 13% House). Furthermore, while the differences were modest, dark money groups were less likely than transparent groups to air personal attacks. These findings contradict the expectation of the insulation

Table 4.7: Fractional Logit Models of Candidate Personal Attack

Independent Variables	Senate	House
Supporting policy attacks	-.062 (.211)	-.073 (.073)
Race competitiveness	.133 (.107)	-.032 (.054)
Likelihood of loss	.083 (.070)	.089** (.033)
Opposing personal attacks	.112 (.286)	.014 (.029)
Challenging candidate	-.177 (.427)	-.559** (.206)
Open seat candidate	.069 (.346)	-.166 (.209)
2012	.443 (.300)	-.080 (.147)
Intercept	-2.113*** (.474)	-1.064*** (.208)
N	87	440
BIC	-319.94	-2422.38
Log Pseudo-Likelihood	-38.42	-203.49

*Standard errors in parentheses*

<sup>+</sup> $p < .10$ , \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$ , two-tailed tests

*Note: Only candidates with any volume of attack advertising are included in the models, and three-way race was dropped due to insufficient variation in this model*

hypothesis. While outside groups might be “free” to engage in personal attacks, they choose to do so less frequently than candidates. The outside agendas hypothesis is only partially supported. While independent groups are more likely than candidates to attack opponents on policy grounds, parties are nearly as likely as candidates to engage in personal attacks in Senate contests.

The difference in types of attacks by different groups suggests that campaigns with greater independent group activity are more policy focused, not less. However

it is also possible that, just as with the mix of attack versus advocacy, a compensatory relationship occurs in the type of attacks by campaign actors that cancels out this difference. To determine if candidates and outside groups have a compensatory relationship on the style of attacks in addition to the proportion of attacks, a model is estimated with the percentage of a candidate's attacks based on personal characteristics as the outcome variable. If the proportion of personal attacks by candidates increases as outside supporting policy-based attacks on their behalf increase, then we should see a positive association between the dependent variable and *supporting policy attacks* – the volume of policy-based attacks by supporting outside groups over the the total volume of the candidate's advertising volume. The other independent variables in the model are identical to the ones in the main model in this study except for *opposing personal attacks*, which is the total volume of personal attacks made by the opposing side on the candidate, divided by the candidate's total advertising volume. For compactness, the competitiveness variables are included as ordered variables of *race competitiveness* and *likelihood of loss*, a measure of how many categories of competitiveness the candidate is ahead or behind.

The estimates from the models provided in Table 4.7 show no association between policy-based attacks by outside groups and candidates' proportion of personal attacks. Neither in Senate or House campaigns does the volume of policy based attacks made by supporting outside groups have any influence on the personal/policy mix of attacks made by candidates. None of the independent variables in the Senate model had effects that were statistically significant, and just two variables in the House model had statistically significant effects on a candidate's proportion of personal versus policy-based attacks: candidates further behind are more likely to attack

on personal grounds, while challenging candidates are less likely to make personal attacks on incumbent opponents. Advertising by outside groups, and in particular by independent groups, makes campaign agendas more policy-focused.

## 4.5 Conclusion

This chapter has shown that the proportion of attack advertising by a candidate is inversely associated with the volume of attack advertising supporting that candidate. This observed relationship is consistent with statements from campaign professionals in interviews that candidates expect outside groups to attack on their behalf. In addition, time series models offer little support for a rival explanation that campaign actors simply adjust based on attacks by allies in previous weeks. Cooperation between campaign actors appears to instead occur through other means such as early legal communication, the use of publicly available ad buy data, and due to reliable expectations of each other's strategies.

As in the previous chapter, the evidence offered here does not definitively prove a causal relationship of outside attack advertising on candidates' advertising tone. However, the opposite causal direction in the relationship is a far less plausible explanation: that outside groups prefer to participate in races where candidates are more positive. Candidates tend to be most positive in contests that are less competitive and would be a waste of outside group resources. In addition, outside group advertising is almost entirely dedicated to attack, so outsiders are not making adjustments and reducing the proportion of their attacks to account for greater attack by candidates.

As with the distribution of media spending in the previous chapter, the com-

pensatory cooperation shown here suggests an especially close and trusting relationship between campaign actors. When a candidate divides the labor of attack with a theoretically independent group, the candidate is partially abandoning a critical weapon for the campaign based on trust that the outside advertiser will pick up the attacks and do so effectively. Such a high degree of trust across actors suggests that independent groups are viewed by candidates as full and trusted members of the party network, not as a shadow party that is a rival for control of the campaign.

There is some reason to think that the relationship demonstrated here for 2010 and 2012 could evolve into a more complex system of cooperation. These were the first two election cycles after the legal changes that greatly expanded independent activity. Advocacy advertising is becoming easier for outside groups to produce: B-roll is getting easier for outsiders to obtain, and candidates are increasingly sensitive to providing outside groups with the tools they need to craft supporting advertising. As the role of outsiders grows they are becoming the majority advertisers in some contests. In races like these there simply may not be enough advocacy to define the candidate if outsiders run exclusively attack advertising. As it becomes easier for outside groups to produce advocacy spots and the relationships between actors become smoother, the division of labor may become more complicated with all actors unconstrained in their ad tone options.

A somewhat surprising finding is that outside groups of all types and independent groups in particular make more policy-oriented attacks than candidates. This could be because personal attacks are more customized attacks that require more localized knowledge. Another possibility is that even party-adjacent outside groups are motivated by policy interests, and they prefer to champion those policy perspectives

in their advertising. Since candidates are the most likely campaign actor to engage in personal attacks, this also suggests that backlash is not a major consideration in the choice to attack opponents on personal versus policy grounds.

Finally, these findings inform some normative concerns about independent group advertising in congressional races. When outsiders are attacking candidates, the attacks are more likely to be of the type that citizens have judged to be fair game in campaigns. Outsiders are more attack-oriented than candidates, but the ratio of attack advertising for candidates is biased downward by safe and well-funded candidates running purely advocacy spots in their contests. Furthermore, because candidates pull back on their own attack advertising when outsiders come in to the race, the net effect of outside group attack advertising on the tone of the campaign is partially muted.<sup>7</sup> Concerns about the lack of accountability of independent group advertising and of the distortive effect of unlimited independent expenditures remain, but at least in terms of advertising tone, the increased role of independent groups in campaigns has not had a corrosive effect on campaign discourse.

---

<sup>7</sup>In an average Senate campaign a candidate's shift towards advocacy in response to outside attacks reduces the total percentage of attack advertising in a campaign from 63% to 57%.

## Chapter 5

### Cooperative Campaigning and Issue Agendas

The previous chapters have demonstrated that outside groups allocate messaging resources to campaigns in a compensatory fashion that is consistent with the objectives of parties, and that within these races candidates and outside groups are effective in dividing the labor of attack and advocacy. This chapter examines whether these patterns of cooperative behavior extend to the more complicated realm of issue content and what the consequences are for campaign agendas. Specifically, do campaign actors engage in a division of labor in issue content? Second, do outside groups have different issue agendas than candidates? In particular, parties focusing on the same set of issues when supporting their candidates across the country and issue-based groups emphasizing their issues of interest in numerous races could be a nationalizing force for parties, homogenizing the issue content of House and Senate campaigns.

#### 5.1 Issue Agendas in Campaigns

For this study I use Egan’s (2013) definition of an issue as a “related set of public debates about a goal” (18). Issues can be divided into consensus issues – those where the public fundamentally agrees on the goal, and nonconsensus issues – those where the public disagrees on the goal (Egan 2013; Kaplan, Park, and Ridout 2006). Consensus issues include areas such as healthcare, crime, terrorism, or jobs.

There is near universal consensus on the goals of more affordable and higher quality healthcare, lower crime, preventing terrorism, and greater job growth. The partisan differences arise in the policies preferred to achieve these goals and the importance placed on realizing the goals. Nonconsensus issues are those where the public disagrees both on policies and the underlying goal of those policies. Many of these issues are ones we often think of as social issues such as gay marriage, abortion, or gun control. Put in these terms, most issues are consensus issues where partisan debates are about policies, not goals.

Broadly speaking, campaigns can adopt two different strategies when choosing which issues to emphasize in paid media. The advertising can attempt to elevate the importance of some issues over others, or the advertising can emphasize the issues that are already the most prominent in public discourse or most important to voters (Ansolabehere and Iyengar 1994; Carsey 2000; Sides 2006).

When pursuing the former strategy, campaigns are seeking advantage in the race by focusing the electorate's attention towards those issues that favor them and hurt the opponent. Parties and candidates have fairly durable reputations for being better at addressing some issues over others (Riker 1983). Issue ownership theory holds that because voters generally regard one party as more competent on some issues than the other party, campaign advertising should elevate considerations of the issues that the favored candidate's party owns (Petrocik 1996). Reputational advantages apply to those issues where the goal is not in dispute, but the prioritization of the issue and the policy prescription is – consensus issues (Egan 2013). Candidates should approach nonconsensus issues differently. Because the underlying goal is in dispute for a nonconsensus issue, parties and candidates cannot earn a reputational



advantage for addressing the issue (at least in a general election setting). Parties can earn a reputation for a position on a nonconsensus issue (e.g., the Republican party is the party of the 2nd Amendment) but not for competency on the issue.

Whereas issue ownership represents largely stable lines of difference between the parties, the salience of these issues fluctuates from one election to the next (Budge and Farlie 1983). Campaigns cannot ignore issues as they become increasingly important to the voting public, regardless of which party owns the issue (Kahn and Kenney 1999). For example, while issues of security and defense have been traditionally owned by Republicans, Democrats would have been foolhardy to ignore these issues in the 2002 midterm elections so soon after 9/11. Similarly, while neither party can often claim firm ownership of issues of the economy, candidates from both parties would have appeared out of touch if they did not directly and prominently address economic anxiety in the fall of 2008.

Neither pure version of issue ownership or salience theory have provided reliable predictions of congressional campaign agendas (Sides 2006, 2007). The more likely explanation lies in between, that is, issue salience and issue ownership can best be thought of not as competing predictions but as two concurrent drivers of campaign agendas. Consistent with this expectation, studies of Canadian and British elections have found that the greater the salience of an issue, the greater the positive effect of that issue's ownership on voters' decisions (Belanger and Meguid 2008; Green and Hobolt 2008), and a study of American congressional elections found that candidates benefit from emphasizing the issues that are most important to voters and are owned by their party (Abbe et al. 2003). In other words, the issues with the greatest utility for a campaign should be those that are *both* important to voters and ones on which

the party has a positive reputation.

Cooperation among campaign actors on the issue emphases of campaigns is more complex than cooperation on spending or attack advertising discussed in Chapters 3 and 4. The previously examined dimensions are binary: spend more or less on advertising; attack more or promote more. For these dimensions of campaign activity when one actor picks up more or less of the activity we can see the other actors adjusting appropriately. A campaign can choose a wide variety of different issues to emphasize and at different levels of strength, however. The variety of groups participating in the campaign and the prohibition on direct communication between one another can present a more serious challenge when determining the mix of which issues to emphasize in advertising.

To assess if different actors are dividing the labor of advertising content across a variety of issues, it is necessary to come up with an estimate of the ideal mix of issue content in campaigns. Outside groups may emphasize different issues than candidates because the outside groups are pursuing their own interests with their advertising, or because the outside groups are engaging in compensatory cooperation by emphasizing issues that the candidates should emphasize but have not. Differentiating between these two messaging strategies requires a sense of what the ideal mix of issues should look like.

To illustrate the differences between compensatory, complementary, and independent issue cooperation, consider some hypothetical distributions of issue content in a campaign, shown in Table 5.1. In this hypothetical example, the best issues to emphasize are estimated to be *A* through *E*, with issue *A* having the highest utility (.40) and issue *E* having the lowest utility (.05). In this campaign the candidate has

Table 5.1: Hypothetical Issue Cooperation Patterns

Issue	Utility	Candidate	Type of Outside Support		
			Complementary	Compensatory	Independent
A	.40			.80	.45
B	.25	.50	.50		.30
C	.20	.25	.25		.25
D	.10	.25	.25		
E	.05			.20	

instead chosen to emphasize *B*, *C*, and *D*. Outside advertising would be engaging in complementary cooperation with the candidate if the independent ads were focused on these same issues and at parallel strength – outside groups taking their cues from the candidate’s ad content. Compensatory cooperation would pick up the important issues not mentioned by the candidate and emphasize issue *A* and issue *E* so that the candidate and outside advertising would then sum to an overall distribution that closely resembles the utility estimates. Independent support for the candidate would ignore the preferences of the candidate and take on any number of patterns. In this example the independent support simply emphasizes the strongest issues for the party in this election cycle, issues *A*, *B*, and *C*.

Without estimates of the utility of the issues *A* through *E*, it would be impossible to differentiate compensatory support from independent support. Both patterns of advertising would diverge from the candidate’s pattern, but we would have no way of evaluating if this divergence was a division of labor or an advertising pattern independent of the candidate’s activity. Measuring whether the match between campaign advertising and issue utilities improves with the addition of outside group advertising offers a way to empirically evaluate if outside groups are engaging in compensatory

cooperation with candidates.

## 5.2 Hypotheses

I expect that outside groups and candidates seek a mix of advertising that emphasizes the issues judged most important to the electorate and most advantageous for the candidate. The various campaign actors should look to compensate for important issues ignored by other actors and de-emphasize the important issues already prominently and frequently discussed by other actors. Empirical evidence for this strategy should be apparent when comparing the issue content of candidates, outsiders, and the total campaign (the sum of candidate advertising and supporting outside advertising) to the estimated utility of issues. Specifically, total campaign advertising will reflect the estimated utilities of issues more closely than candidate advertising alone. The main hypothesis to be tested, then, is as follows:

**Compensatory issue hypothesis:** The convergence of total campaign agendas with utility estimates will be higher than the convergence of candidate agendas with utility estimates.

Outside groups have different overall objectives than candidates, and these differences should have an effect on the issue content of these groups' advertising. Issue-based groups should have more narrow issue agendas focused on their issue(s) of interest, while parties and party-adjacent groups should be more nationalized in their messaging. These expectations lead to two secondary hypotheses about the issue biases of outside groups.

Issue-based groups should be the most constrained category of actor in their selection of issues for emphasis in their campaign advertising. Issue-based groups are agents for issue-motivated principals, whether those principals are a small group (or single individuals) of wealthy donors such as Next Gen Climate Action or a broad membership-based organization like AARP. Principals of these groups are motivated by a policy interest, and they will prefer their political dollars to be spent promoting their issue of interest. Furthermore, if an issue-based group is well known, the group's messages should be more credible when they are on the topic of the group's interest. Issue utilities represent a pragmatic appraisal of an issue's value to a campaign. Issue-based groups should be more programmatic than pragmatic in their issue selection. Therefore, I hypothesize that issue-based group advertising will be most weakly associated with issue utility estimates compared to other categories of campaign actor.

**Issue bias hypothesis:** Issue-based group advertising content will have the weakest association among all group types with issue utility estimates.

Parties and party-adjacent groups seek legislative majorities and to promote the party more broadly, and they have an interest in maintaining a consistent message that maintains a party's "brand." These groups should be pragmatic in their issue selection and be closely attentive to the parties' owned issues and the nationally salient issues in each election. Furthermore, these groups are the largest outside advertisers, simultaneously airing advertisements in a large number of campaigns. Parties and party-adjacent groups may be inattentive to the quirks of individual districts and candidates, and instead choose nationally consistent, homogenous issue

content. Therefore, I expect that party and party-adjacent group advertising should most closely reflect the issues that are owned and salient in each election cycle.

**Party bias hypothesis:** Parties and party-adjacent group advertising content will have the strongest association among all group types with issue utility estimates.

### 5.3 Data

The source data for the analyses in this chapter are the same as those used in Chapter 4, WMP advertising data weighted by market and daypart. The WMP tracks mentions in campaign advertising across 59 issue categories for each airing of an ad. These issues were collapsed into 18 categories that align with the set of issue categories for measures of partisan issue ownership and public salience used in the analyses performed here.

In a process similar to the one used by Franz, Fowler, and Ridout (2016) and Sides (2006) the issue mentions in each ad are weighted according to the number of issues mentioned in each ad, that is, for an ad that mentions 3 issues each is weighted 0.33. The mentions are further weighted according to the daypart and market in which the ad ran. Finally, the issue mentions are aggregated for the general election phase (from the date of the state’s partisan primary to the general election day) by the category of campaign actor to calculate the volume of advertising devoted to each issue by each actor in each campaign.

Senate candidates raised an average of 7 issues across all of their advertising in the race (Mean=7.2, SD=2.9), while House candidates raised an average of 5

issues (Mean=5.0, SD=2.3). The total campaigns (candidate plus outside supporting advertising) raised an average of 8 issues in Senate races (Mean=8.2, SD=3.3) and 6 issues in House races (Mean=5.8, SD=2.7).<sup>1</sup>

Figures 5.1 and 5.2 show the proportion of issue mentions in federal legislative races in 2010 and 2012. Democratic campaigns in 2010 (Figure 5.1a) focused most strongly on jobs and taxes, followed by the economy, social security, and healthcare. Outside groups supporting Democratic candidates were diffuse in their issue mentions and mostly paralleled candidate issue priorities. As a party, the Republicans in 2010 (Figure 5.1b) were much more concentrated in their message. The top five issues made up 85% of the total issue content of Republican advertising, compared to 61% of Democratic mentions going to the top five issues. Debt and government spending was the top issue of Republican campaigns, followed by jobs, the economy, healthcare, and taxes. Outside groups supporting Republicans dedicated nearly all of their supporting advertising to these same five issues, further accentuating the separation of top issues from secondary ones in Republican campaign advertising.

In 2012 healthcare was the number one issue for both Democrats (Figure 5.2a) and Republicans (Figure 5.2b). For Democrats, the issue of taxes was the second most emphasized, followed by a steep decline to the economy, jobs, social security, and debt / government spending. Similar to 2010, the Republican campaigns were narrower in focus. Issue mentions by both candidates and outside groups were devoted overwhelmingly to the same five issues as in the previous campaign cycle: healthcare, taxes, debt / government spending, jobs, and the economy. The issue of taxes was boosted by outside advertising supporting both parties. Outsiders

---

<sup>1</sup>Among those campaigns with any television advertising: Senate N=116; House N=626.

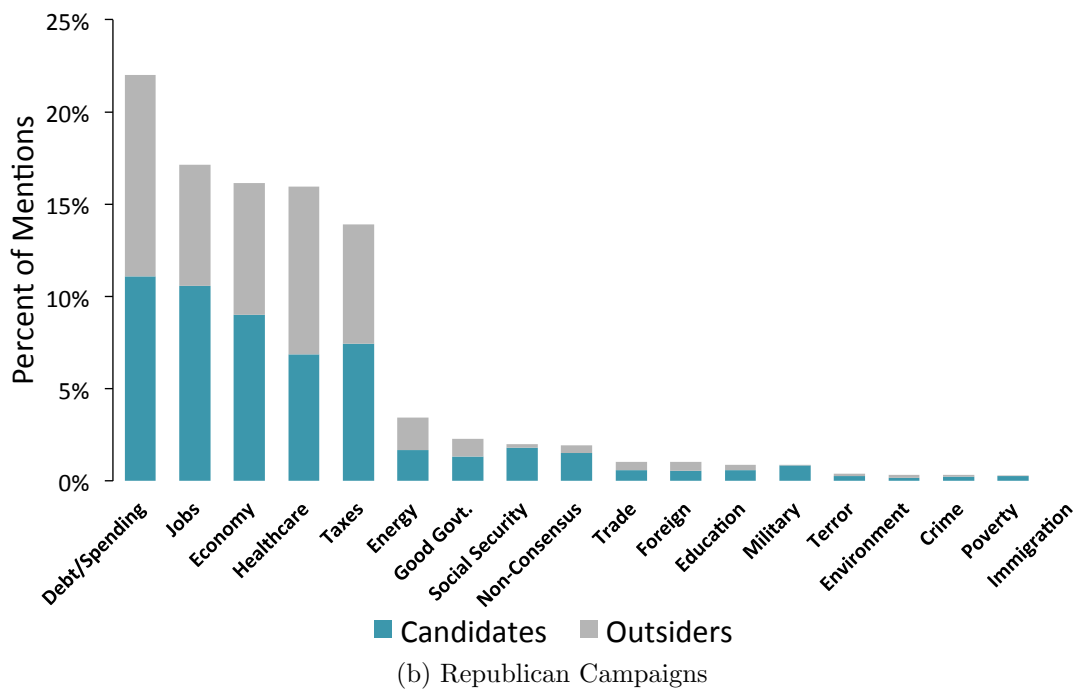
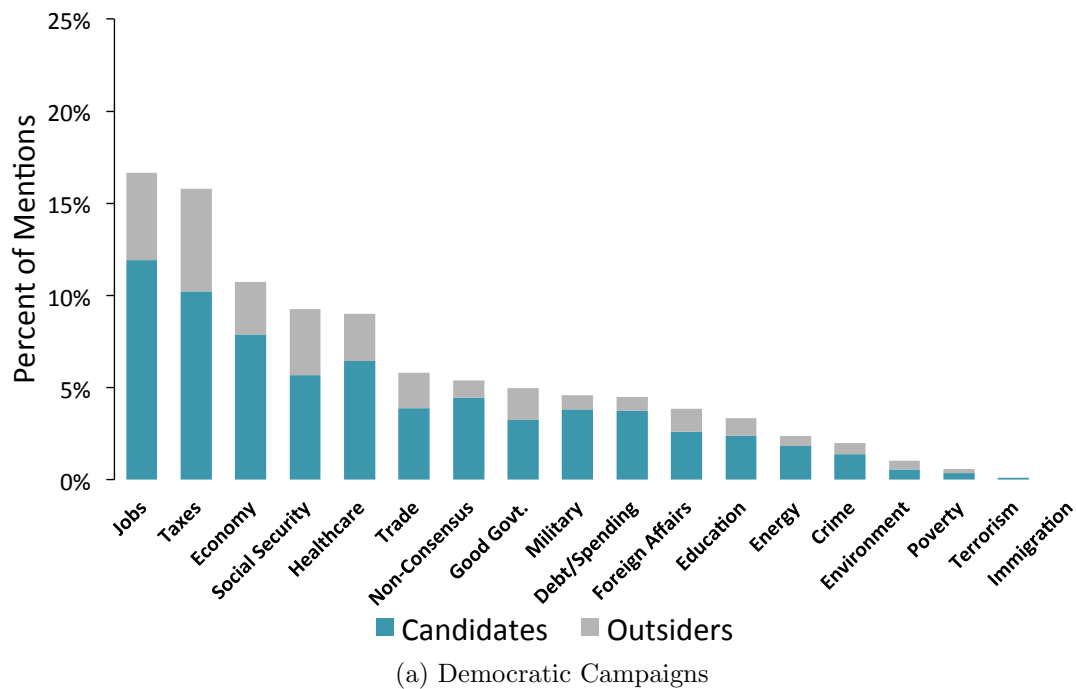


Figure 5.1: Issue Mentions in 2010



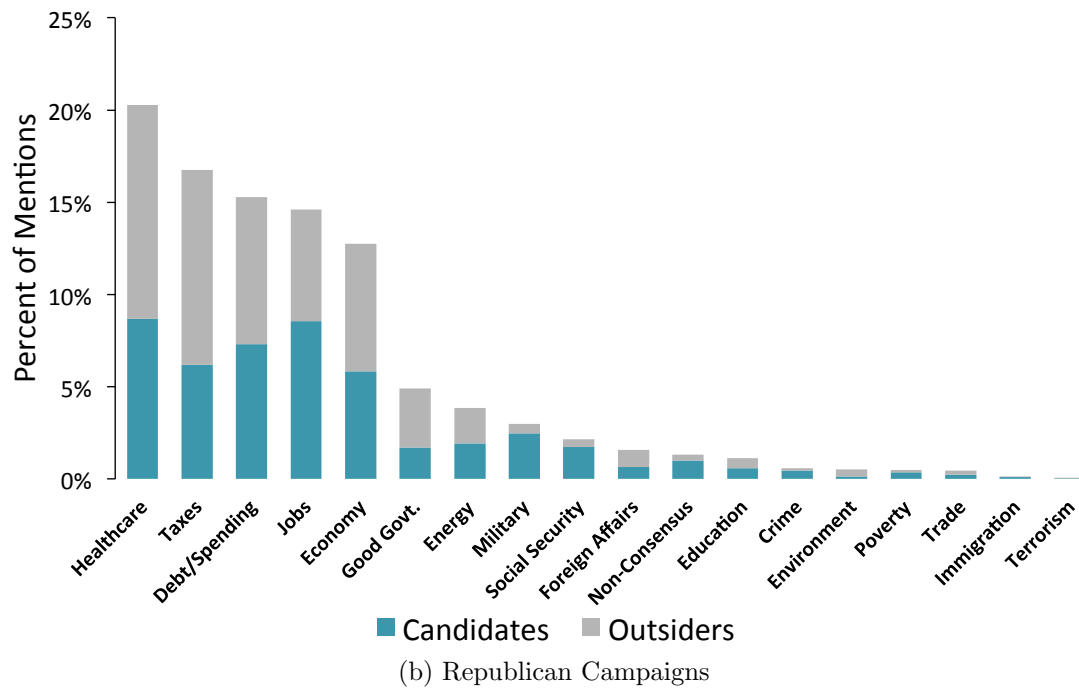
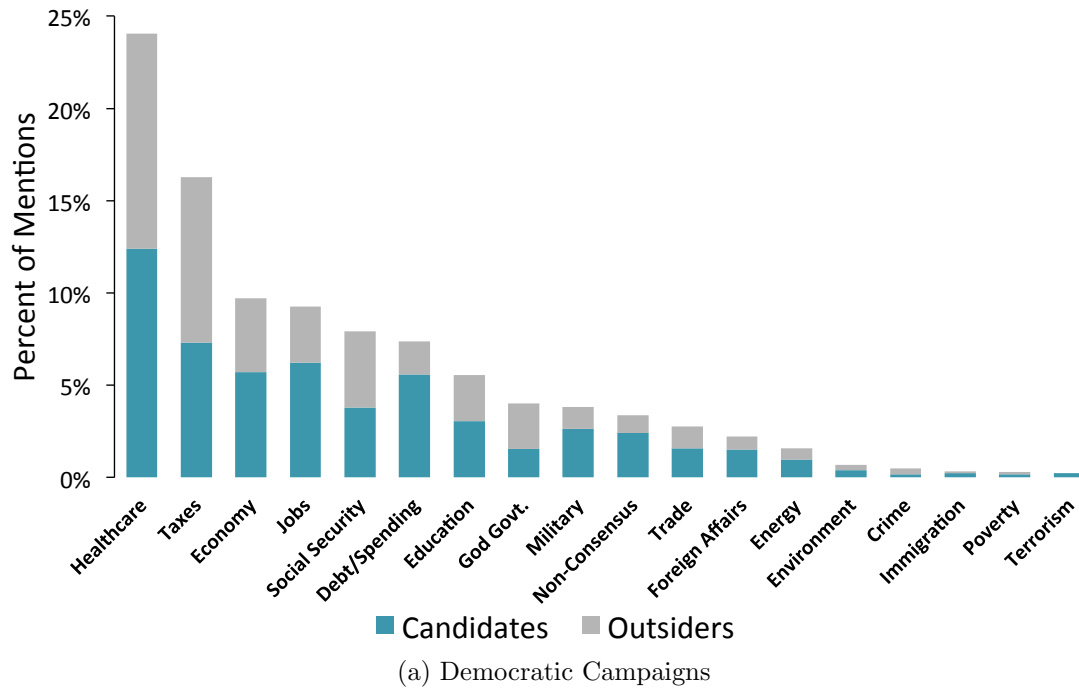


Figure 5.2: Issue Mentions in 2012

made taxes a clear second priority for Democratic campaigns, while for Republicans stronger emphasis by outsiders moved taxes up in rank order of issue mentions in their races.

It is also worth noting which issues were rarely mentioned by candidates. Immigration has been a major issue that the President and Congress have attempted to grapple with for the past several years, but it received almost no attention in campaign advertising in either election year. Also, perhaps because this study is limited to general election activity, the set of non-consensus issues (gun control, gay marriage, abortion, etc.) grouped together were still rarely mentioned by candidates or outside groups in television spots during the general election.

## 5.4 Analyses

The first step in the analysis is to estimate what the issue agenda should look like for Republican and Democratic candidates in each election year. It is beyond the scope of this project to estimate an ideal issue agenda separately for each individual campaign. Campaign managers, consultants, and political scientists do not have a consensus on an ideal agenda. Furthermore, an ideal issue agenda can vary for individual candidates when they have earned personal issue reputations based on their background or political history (Arbour 2013). Instead, the estimates created here describe what the average candidate of each party in each year would be expected to emphasize.

I expect that the issues that will have the greatest utility for the typical candidate and are the ideal choices for issue emphases in campaign advertising are those that are owned by the candidate's party, moderated by the salience of the issue

for the public in that election year. In other words, the value of any issue to the campaign is *salience*  $\times$  *ownership*.

I estimate a weight for each issue according to the issue’s ownership by the party and the issue’s salience in the electorate in that election year. Partisan ownership of an issue is obtained from Egan (2013), who reports partisan ownership across 18 issue categories at decade intervals. The ownership levels from 2000 – 2010 are used here since they are the most recent available and because partisan ownership of issues is assumed to be stable over long periods (Petrocik 1996). These ownership values were then re-scaled from 0 to 1.<sup>2</sup> The salience of each issue was obtained from Franz, Fowler, and Ridout (2016), who had calculated the salience of 40 issue categories using most-important-problem (MIP) measures from Gallup polls in 2010 and 2012. These 40 categories were then collapsed to align with the 18 categories used by Egan (2013). Using these values, I calculate a weight for each issue  $i$  as follows:

$$Weight_i = \frac{s_i \times o_i}{\sum_{i=1}^{18} (s_i \times o_i)} \quad (5.1)$$

Where  $o_i$  represents the candidate party’s ownership of the issue and  $s_i$  represents the salience of the issue in the public in that election year.<sup>3</sup>

It is not realistic to expect campaigns to engage all 18 issue areas and it would be inadvisable for a campaign to be so scattershot in its message. Furthermore,

---

<sup>2</sup>The extreme values of 0 and 1 were manually adjusted to .01 and .99 respectively, otherwise the least owned issue would be predicted to have zero utility for a candidate even if it was highly salient. Regardless, the issues affected by this adjustment were not included in the eventual analyses because of their low salience and thus low utility for either party.

<sup>3</sup>The ownership and salience values for each issue category are shown in the Appendix in Table A.3.

measuring campaigns' convergence with 18 issue categories would favor campaigns where outsiders have come in to simply broaden the agenda – not a desirable outcome. Instead, I take the top 7 issues in 2010 and top 6 issues in 2012. Weight values for issues after the 7th in 2010 and the 6th in 2012 dropped off considerably, so these were natural cutoff points.<sup>4</sup>

Using these weights a *utility* is calculated for each top issue as follows:

$$Utility_i = \frac{w_i}{\sum_{i=1}^n w_i} \quad (5.2)$$

Where  $w_i$  is the weight for each included issue  $i$  for each party in each election year. The resulting values are proportions of expected issue mentions, shown in Table 5.2. For example, based on the level of Republican ownership and the salience of issues for the public a typical Republican candidate in 2010 is expected to dedicate 29.3% of issue mentions to the economy and 11.2% of mentions to topics of good government (e.g., government waste, present for votes and hearings, corruption, etc.).

Some issues are notable for their absence in these estimates: taxes, education, social security, and the environment. The issue of taxes is firmly owned by Republicans, while education, social security, and the environment are all solid ground for Democrats. However, these issues were simply not salient enough to a sufficient number of voters to warrant attention in these two campaign cycles.<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup>The weight score at the cutoff points was .02. The highest weight scores, for the economy, were .15.

<sup>5</sup>This is part of a larger pattern that the most strongly owned issues by one party tended to be issues that were salient to few voters – other issues firmly owned by one party but important to few voters were domestic security, crime, military, and trade (recall that this study spans 2010 and 2012). I suspect that these issues are uncontested by the non-owning party because of their low importance in campaigns. Conversely, both parties need to fight for their reputations on the most

Table 5.2: Issue Utility Estimates

	2010		2012	
	Republicans	Democrats	Republicans	Democrats
Economy	29.3%	26.1%	32.8%	27.6%
Jobs	20.1%	25.0%	21.6%	25.4%
Good govt.	11.2%	7.3%	14.0%	8.6%
Foreign affairs	7.1%	6.6%	—	—
Immigration	6.8%	—	4.1%	—
Debt/Spending	6.7%	4.5%	9.2%	5.9%
Healthcare	6.0%	15.9%	7.0%	17.4%
Poverty	—	4.3%	—	4.9%

*All other issue categories had utility estimates of zero for both parties in both years*

Also, the calculated utilities of healthcare may appear odd given the controversy of Obamacare in 2010 and 2012, since they are based on strong values for issue ownership by Democrats. Two points bear considering on the ownership of healthcare. First, while support for Obamacare was evenly split in both 2010 and 2012, a significant portion of the opposition to Obamacare was from individuals who wanted to see the health care reform go farther. Second, throughout the contentious passage and implementation of Obamacare, President Obama and the Democrats in Congress maintained higher levels of trust with the public on handling the healthcare issue (Newport 2010).

It must be noted, too, the limitations of these estimates. This represents what a generic and pragmatic party candidate would emphasize. It ignores local conditions and it ignores characteristics of the candidates themselves. It shouldn't

---

important issues, thus issues that are perennially salient will be unlikely to be firmly owned by either party. The nature of this relationship will need to be explored in a separate study, however.

be considered the optimal campaign agenda for every candidate, but it is at least a rational campaign agenda. Stronger convergence with these utility estimates should be interpreted as campaigns drawing closer to the expected issue agenda of a generic, pragmatic party candidate when outside group activity is included. Weaker association with these utility estimates when outside group advertising is included indicates that outside groups are biasing campaign agendas away from a purely pragmatic agenda of a typical candidate of that party. Perfect adherence to these estimates is unlikely, but if campaign actors pull campaigns away from these estimates, this suggests that outside groups are distorting agendas.

To evaluate whether outside groups play a compensatory, complementary, or independent role with respect to candidates, the level of similarity between campaign actors' advertising and utility estimates is measured. If outside groups are playing a compensatory role, then the sum of all advertising by allied campaign actors on one side of a race should be more similar to the utility estimates than the candidate advertising alone.

Following Franz, Fowler, and Ridout (2016) and Sigelman and Buell (2004), this similarity is measured as convergence. Convergence scores for a campaign are calculated as follows:

$$Convergence = 1 - \sum_{i=1}^n \frac{(|I_{iC} - I_{iU}|)}{(I_{iC} + I_{iU})} \quad (5.3)$$

where  $I$  is the proportion of advertising volume dedicated to issue  $i$ ,  $C$  is the campaign actor, and  $U$  is the issue utility estimate obtained from Equation 5.2. The top term is the absolute difference in the issue's emphasis, weighted by the sum of the issue's emphasis in the bottom term. Summed across the full set of issues, this gives us the

divergence, and 1 minus the divergence is the convergence. A convergence value of 0 indicates no match between the selection and relative weight of issues in a campaign and the issue utilities, and a value of 1 indicates a perfect match between the selection and relative weight of issues in a campaign and the issue utilities.

Senate and House campaigns where both the candidate and at least one category of outside group ran supporting advertising are included in a pooled sample of the 2010 and 2012 election cycles (Senate N=75; House N=288).<sup>6</sup> The convergence values for candidates, outside groups, and the total campaign (candidate advertising plus supporting outside group advertising) are shown in Figure 5.3, separately for Senate and House campaigns.

Proceeding down the lefthand side of Figure 5.3, Senate candidates' campaign issue agendas matched the utility estimates with an average score of .41 (SD= .13). Outside groups averaged utility estimates of .40 (SD= .15). The total advertising by all actors in each Senate campaign converged with utility estimates with an average score of .43 (SD= .11). Moving down the right side of Figure 5.3, House candidate campaign advertising converged with utility estimates with an average of .40 (SD= .14). Outside groups' average convergence was .33 (SD= .17). Total campaigns in House races had an average convergence with utility estimates of .41 (SD= .12).

The means of campaign actor convergences suggest that, consistent with the cooperative agendas hypothesis, the combined advertising of candidates and outsiders aligns more closely with the utility estimates than candidate advertising alone. To

---

<sup>6</sup>Three outlier cases were dropped from the House sample due to trivial candidate spending and heavy outside spending that resulted in upwardly skewed changes from candidate to total campaign convergence scores that were a result of advertising volume, not issue selection: Eric Cantor in 2010 (R-inc), Joe Walsh in 2012 (R-inc), and David Rouzer in 2012 (R-cha).

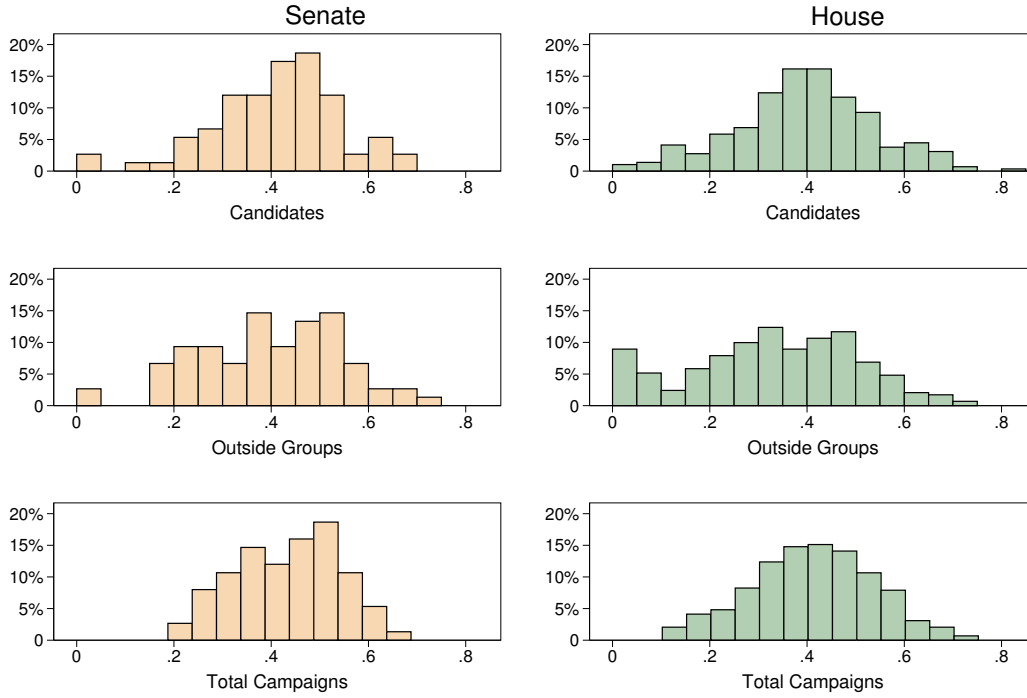


Figure 5.3: Campaign Actor Convergence With Utility Estimates

formally evaluate whether these are meaningful differences a t-test of the mean convergence values of candidates compared to total campaigns is performed, and the results are provided in Table 5.3. The t-tests support the compensatory issue hypothesis. The higher average convergence scores for total advertising in campaigns versus candidate advertising alone (among campaigns with both candidate and outsider activity) reaches statistical significance in both the Senate ( $p = .007$ ) and House ( $p = .037$ ) samples in a paired two-tailed t-test. Furthermore, outside group advertising by itself more weakly matches utility estimates than candidate advertising, providing further evidence of a compensatory pattern of cooperation. If increased total campaign convergence was powered by the addition of outside groups' independent support that simply matched utility estimates, then outsider advertising would



Table 5.3: T-Tests of Issue Convergence

	Candidates	Total Campaign	t value
Senate	.409	.434	2.76**
(N=75)	(.015)	(.013)	
House	.398	.411	2.09*
(N=288)	(.008)	(.007)	
<i>Standard errors in parentheses, two-tailed tests: *<math>p &lt; .05</math>, **<math>p &lt; .01</math></i>			

have higher convergence scores than candidate advertising.<sup>7</sup>

Although the sample sizes become quite small, breaking out the results by party in Table 5.4 reveals two patterns of interest. First, Republicans overall have higher convergence values both for the candidates and for the total campaigns. This could be a result of Republicans being more nationalized in their congressional campaigns, Democrats being less disciplined in their message, or this could be because the issue utility estimates performed better in capturing the ideal Republican issues than in capturing the ideal Democratic issues. Second, while the substantive change from candidates to total campaigns was similar for three of four subgroups, Democratic House candidates on average had no improvement in their convergence scores.

Another way to view the change in issue agendas is the net difference in convergence for each campaign moving from candidate advertising to total advertising. Figure 5.4 shows the net difference for each campaign between the convergence score for the candidate's advertising versus the total advertising of all actors taken together. In the Senate, 52 campaigns had a positive difference in the convergence

---

<sup>7</sup>Another possibility is that the improved convergence of total campaign advertising is simply a function of greater advertising volume. Convergence was not associated with advertising volume, shown in Appendix B.

Table 5.4: Partisan Differences in Convergence

	Candidates	Total Campaign
Democratic Senate (N=35)	.376	.409
Democratic House (N=139)	.371	.363
Republican Senate (N=40)	.437	.456
Republican House (N=149)	.423	.456

score (meaning that the convergence of the total campaign is higher than the convergence score of the candidate's advertising alone) while 23 campaigns had a negative difference. In the House, 141 campaigns had a positive difference and 144 campaigns had a negative difference.

What does a typical improvement of a total campaign's convergence look like? Two examples are shown in Figure 5.5 of campaigns where the convergence of the total campaign improved by about one standard deviation (about .08 change) compared to candidate advertising. In 2012 Heidi Heitcamp (Figure 5.5a) ran for the open Senate seat vacated by fellow Democrat Kent Conrad from North Dakota. In her own advertising, Heitcamp mostly focused on three issues: government spending, education, and healthcare. Outsiders' emphasis on the economy appears to have been the largest factor in increasing the overall Heitcamp campaign's convergence score. Heitcamp would go on to win this race by a margin of less than 1 percentage point.

In 2010 Republican Bob Gibbs (Figure 5.5b) challenged incumbent Democrat Zack Space in Ohio's 18<sup>th</sup> House district. Gibbs' campaign focused on four issues: jobs, taxes, trade, and foreign affairs. Outside groups ran advertising that was mostly

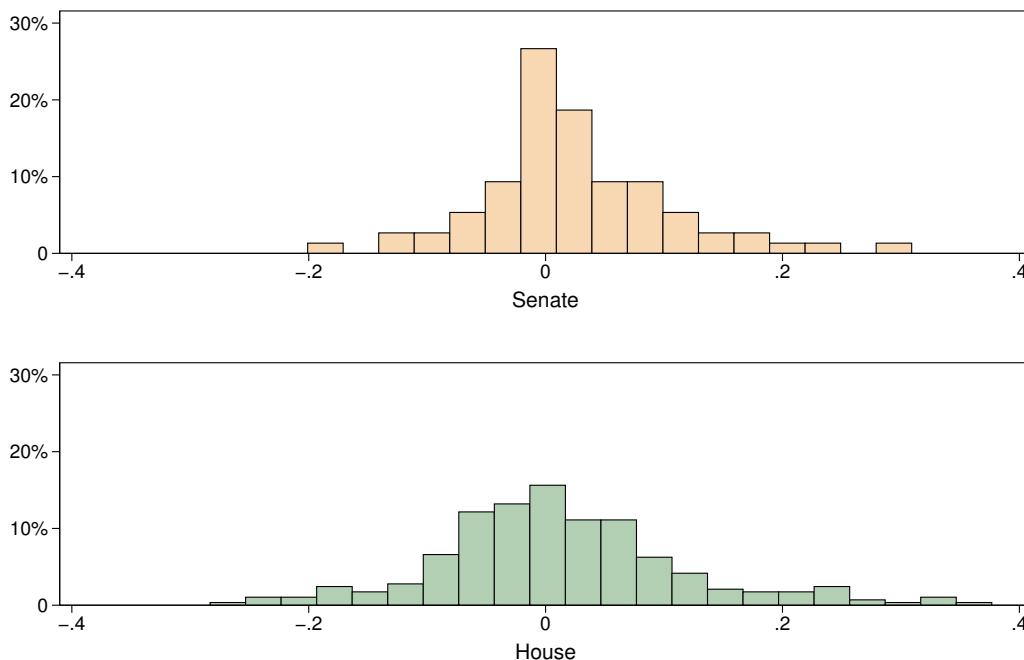


Figure 5.4: Change in Convergence From Candidates to Total Campaigns

parallel to Gibbs’ own advertising in the emphases on trade and jobs. However, outsiders picked up the general issue of the economy, which was ignored in the candidate’s advertising.

In these examples we also see candidate advertising emphasizing issues that could be more salient in their district than in the nation as a whole. In Heitcamp’s Senate race the emphasis on education may have been wise in her district but was not salient enough nationally to warrant attention from a generic Democrat. The candidate and outside groups’ focus on trade in the Ohio 18<sup>th</sup> was inconsistent with utility estimates, but was logical for this district. This was a Southeast Ohio district, an economically depressed region adjacent to Appalachia and an area where the

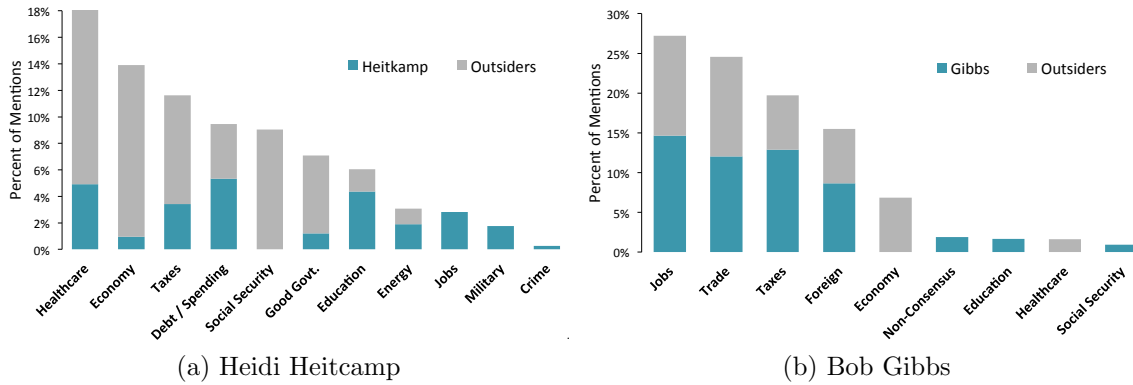


Figure 5.5: Sample Campaigns with One S.D. Change in Convergence

decline of manufacturing jobs has long been a major issue (something that was powerfully illustrated by this region’s strong swing towards Trump in 2016).

In both of these examples outside groups “filled in” issue mentions for major national topics like the economy, healthcare, and social security. In Heitkamp’s Senate campaign she made almost no mention of the economy, and in Gibbs’ House campaign outsiders also picked up the broad issue of the economy on behalf of the candidate. Outsiders’ emphasis on the biggest national issues like healthcare and the economy brought these candidates’ messaging closer in line to a nationally typical member of their party. Whether these candidates intended to run an entirely local-issues campaign, or if they anticipated outside groups picking up the other national issues is not clear from these data. Either way, in these examples we see outside group advertising as a nationalizing force for candidates’ campaigns.

The issue bias and party bias hypotheses predict that the highest convergence scores will be for party and party-adjacent group advertising, while the lowest convergence scores will be for issue-based group advertising. Convergence scores by variety of campaign actor are shown in Table 5.5.

Table 5.5: Convergence by Campaign Actor

	Senate	House
Candidates	.409	.398
SD	(.13)	(.14)
N	75	288
Parties	.380	.301
SD	(.177)	(.179)
N	56	245
Party-adjacent groups	.350	.296
SD	(.167)	(.173)
N	51	138
Issue-based groups	.338	.330
SD	(.168)	(.186)
N	57	164

Support for the issue-based hypothesis is mixed. T-tests of means in Table 5.5 indicate that issue-based group advertising convergence scores are significantly lower than candidates in both Senate and House races ( $p < .001$ ) and significantly lower than party advertising in Senate races ( $p < .05$ ), however issue-based group advertising convergence is not significantly lower than party-adjacent group advertising in Senate races and issue-based group convergence is actually higher than parties and party-adjacent groups in House races.

This implies that issue-based group advertising improves or degrades total campaign convergence with issue utilities as well or as poorly as advertising from parties and party-adjacent groups. Pairwise correlations between the proportion of outside advertising coming from issue-based groups and the net difference in convergence between candidates and total campaign advertising verifies that this is the case. In both Senate and House races the pairwise correlations are quite weak:  $-.10$  for Senate and  $.05$  for House. In other words, there is no significant difference in the

change in convergence scores whether the advertising support is from issue-based groups or parties and party-adjacent groups.

The results in Table 5.5 offer little support for the party bias hypothesis. Parties and party-adjacent groups have lower convergence scores than candidates in both the Senate and House. The lone comparison that supports the party bias hypothesis is the higher convergence of parties (.38) compared to issue-based groups (.34) in Senate races.

Outside groups' poor convergence is mostly a result of their lower volume and narrower agendas in advertising. Candidates mount complete campaigns with advertising that covers nearly the full set of issues they wish to engage, whereas outside groups of all types instead air more narrowly focused advertising. The average advertising campaign from candidates (Senate and House combined) mentioned 6.5 issues, party advertising raised 3.6 issues on average, party-adjacent groups raised 1.9 issues on average, and issue-based groups raised an average of 2.4 issues in each campaign.<sup>8</sup> In short, outside groups of all types, not just issue-based groups, tended to be specialists in their advertising while candidates were generalists.

## 5.5 Conclusion

The issue content of advertising in House and Senate campaigns is modestly nudged towards owned and salient issues by outside group advertising. These findings are broadly consistent with those by Franz, Fowler, and Ridout (2016, 738), who find that “fears of interest groups ‘hijacking’ campaign agendas appear unfounded.”

---

<sup>8</sup>Among those campaigns where both candidates and at least one variety of outside group aired advertising, N=368.

However, the analyses here offer a somewhat different picture of how outside groups harmonize their advertising content with the candidates they support. Franz, Fowler, and Ridout conclude that campaign actors do not divide the labor of raising issues based on the finding that campaign advertisers are not less likely to raise an issue if it has previously been raised by another supporting campaign actor. The approach used here – evaluating whether overall campaign agendas are improved or worsened by the addition of outside advertising – reaches a different conclusion, namely, that outsiders on average bring campaign advertising into closer match with issues that are owned by the party and salient to the public.

Outside group advertising is more narrowly focused than candidate advertising. One consequence of this narrowness of issue content is that outside groups of all types have lower convergence scores on average compared to candidates. However, when the narrow agendas of these outside groups are included, total campaigns tend to be more convergent, not less, with issue utilities. In other words, while outsiders are specialized, they are also compensatory in their support.

The evidence in this chapter suggests that outside groups tend to bring a narrow but also national set of issues to legislative campaigns. Outside groups don't emphasize the full agenda of issues that are salient to Americans in a given election year, but instead tend concentrate on a small set of top issues, in the cases of 2010 and 2012 that was taxes, healthcare and the overall economy. Outside groups appear to take a few national issues that are important and turn them into dominant issues. For example, healthcare was a top-tier issue for many candidates in 2012, but because of outside group advertising healthcare became a dominant issue in the campaigns overall.

Furthermore, nationalization of campaigns has potential long-term effects on party images. When more of the total advertising in campaigns comes from the national parties, party-adjacent groups, and issue-based groups, this leaves less room for local issues and de-emphasizes individual candidates' differences with the national party. When the issues raised by the campaign by a Democrat in South Dakota become increasingly similar to the issues raised by a campaign by a Democrat in Florida, individuals' party images should become more consistent but also narrower. The party labels may look clearer than ever, but it is more difficult for a party to appear to be a "big tent."

Similar to the results in the previous chapter, the pattern of compensatory behavior is stronger in the Senate than in the House. Senate races were more likely than House races to have a positive change to their convergence when outsider advertising was included. Stronger evidence of compensatory issue support from outsiders may be due to the larger scale and higher profile of Senate races – they have far larger budgets than House contests and they attract more outside activity. With more money involved and a larger prize at stake in a Senate contest, perhaps campaign actors pay closer attention to harmonizing their efforts.



## Chapter 6

### Conclusion

#### 6.1 Summarizing Cooperation in Campaigns

The 2010 court decisions in *Citizens United* and *Speechnow.org* presented both an opportunity and a challenge for candidates and the parties. Unrestricted funding of expenditure-only groups offered an efficient way to bring large amounts of money into campaigns. However, candidates and parties do not have direct control over these resources. The inability to directly coordinate with these new actors could cause inefficiencies in how these resources are used or even a hijacking of campaigns by outsiders with their own objectives. Instead, the campaign advertising patterns and relationships between actors presented in this dissertation show that campaign actors have adapted well to these changes and cooperate as a team. In the aggregate, outside groups are more pragmatic than programatic. Super PACs and 501(c)s do not represent a fragmentation of campaigns or a rise of “shadow parties.” Instead, independent expenditure party groups and party-adjacent groups are the vehicles for parties to return to prominence in campaigns.

Party organizations are increasingly thought of as networks. Compensatory cooperation across multiple dimensions of campaign activity illustrate how these networks engage in campaigning. Outside groups allocate resources across similarly competitive contests in a way that is consistent with a seat-maximizing objective, shoring up candidates who have spent less on media and passing by those candidates

who have run more of their own advertising. When outside groups enter these races, the groups air almost exclusively attacks against opponents. Supported candidates compensate for this by reducing their own attack advertising. Finally, outside group advertising brings campaigns in closer alignment with the issues most salient to voters and most credible for candidates of that party.

Actors benefit from each others' advantages and compensate for each others' constraints. When spending on media, candidates are constrained by the size of their war chests, so outsiders compensate by directing spending where it is needed most. Outside groups are mostly constrained to attack ads, so candidates compensate, tailoring their mix of attack and advocacy based on the level of outside support. On issue content, the story is more complex. Candidates emphasize a broad variety of issues and are attentive to local conditions and candidate traits while outside groups tend to be more national and policy-motivated in their advertising, but these come together in overall agendas that are more consistent with the expectations of issue ownership and salience theories of campaign content.

If any subgroup of outsiders is hijacking campaigns, it should be issue-based groups. Issue-based groups do behave differently than parties and party-adjacent groups, but not always in the expected ways. As anticipated, issue-based groups display slight but important differences in the allocation of resources across races. Issue-based groups' attack advertising is more policy-based than candidates, but not more than other types of outsiders. Issue-based groups are specialists in their advertising, but again not more so than the parties or party-adjacent groups. More surprisingly, issue-based groups are not less attentive to owned and salient issues than parties or party-adjacent groups, and greater support by issue-based groups

at the expense of parties and party-adjacent groups does not cause deviations from pragmatic issue agendas. In short, while issue-based groups appear somewhat more programmatic in their choices of which candidates to support, the content of their advertising is as pragmatic as parties and party-adjacent groups.

Finally, compensatory behavior indicates the strength of the relationships within the networks of campaign actors. Compensatory cooperation, a division of labor, is a stronger form of cooperation than complementary cooperation, simply following the leader. For one actor to provide complementary assistance that actor need only know the activities of the other actor and simply mimic the activity. For that actor to provide compensatory assistance, the actor must know both the activities of the other actors and the desired overall mix or balance.

Strictly speaking, the evidence presented here that campaign actors divide the labor of campaigns is associational and not causal. However, compensatory associations between campaign actors' behavior has been observed over several dimensions of campaigns and both between campaigns and within campaigns. Finding a division of labor simultaneously at work in spending across races, in the tone of advertising, and in the issue selection by campaign actors should assuage concerns that these patterns might be accidental and not the product of intentional cooperative behavior.

## **6.2 The Consequences of Cooperation in Campaigns**

The shift away from a system where candidates raised and spent most of the money in campaigns to one where networked actors with national reach now control large portions of spending has a number of consequences for campaigns. First,

outside groups have made the total distribution of resources across campaigns more efficient. Parties have distributed their resources in response to competitiveness for decades, but the increase in outside spending means that more of the total resources in campaigns are fluid across districts. More than ever, the closest races receive the most attention.

Second, outside groups make campaigns more informative for voters. Competitive races attract the most outside advertising, which mostly comes in the form of policy-based attacks. The compensatory relationship between candidates and outside groups means that candidates are backing off their own attacks, which are more often personal attacks on opponents. In perhaps an unintended and unexpected consequence of the rise of independent expenditure groups, the discourse in crowded campaigns is of higher quality than when candidates have unilateral control over the message.

Third, outsiders have made campaigns more nationalized in two ways: first, by engaging nationally salient issues more at the expense of issues that could be more important at the local level; and second, homogenizing campaigns by running advertising on the same issues across numerous races at the same time. Most outside group advertising in congressional races is created by parties and party-adjacent independent groups. These groups tend to focus on the major national issues of the election, to the point of sometimes using virtually identical “cookie-cutter” ads in multiple districts at once. Issue-based groups will emphasize their issue of interest and be less sensitive to the nuances of an individual candidate or district. Both conditions result in campaign discourse that is less local and more homogeneous from one race to the next.

Furthermore, polarization and partisan sorting can be reinforced by the nationalization of campaigns. It is harder for a Democrat in a rural or Southern district to tailor the campaign platform to appeal to the local median voter when half of the advertising on their side of the campaign is authored by the DCCC and NextGen Climate Action. Outside groups cannot be blamed for the rise of partisan sorting or the decline of ticket splitting – these phenomena were well under way long before the legal changes in 2010 expanded outsiders’ independent role in campaigns (Baldassarri and Gelman 2008; Hetherington 2009; Levendusky 2009). But outside activity makes it less likely that these trends will reverse course. Bending congressional campaigns throughout the country closer to a standard party agenda creates narrower, more distinct, and homogenous party images in the electorate that amplify national polarization and reinforce partisan sorting.

Finally, these findings have an implication for the measurement and study of campaign activity. Compensatory cooperation between actors means that campaign actors’ behavior is in part determined by the activities of other actors. A study of campaigns that observes only a partial set of actors (candidates, parties, or independent groups) has a systematically biased view since campaign actors’ activities are interdependent. Campaigns are a team activity with multiple actors.

### **6.3 The Near-Term Future of Cooperation**

This system is unlikely to change in the near future since parties and candidates are both getting what they want from network-centered campaigns. Independent groups can raise vast sums of money from a small set of wealthy contributors far faster and easier than parties could after the enactment of BCRA. Parties don’t

control the message, but the allied groups cooperate well enough on message that direct control is not necessary. Candidates benefit from the system by getting more support when their own budgets are not large enough to match the demands of the race, and outsiders attack opponents so the candidates can run more positive advertising of their own. In addition, candidates notoriously dislike raising money. Candidates might like a campaign system where outside groups carry more of the responsibility of raising and spending money and the candidate is able to spend less time on the phone with donors.

When campaign finance systems change, the most likely causes are scandal or partisan advantage (La Raja 2008). Since Republicans enjoy a fundraising advantage through super PACs and 501(c)s it would presumably be the Democrats who would seek to change the system if they had the majorities needed to pass new laws. Even this scenario is not likely, however. Democrats have adjusted well to the current system. The strength of compensatory resource allocation is nearly identical on both sides, and Democratic campaigns cooperate more strongly on advertising tone than Republicans. Equally important, campaign finance is rarely an important enough issue to voters to compel action from lawmakers. Campaign finance related scandals can force Congress to act, but these events are rare and difficult to predict. Unplanned changes could also occur through the courts, but the rise of super PACs and 501(c) groups was caused by court decisions in 2010, so reversing course is unlikely.

Another threat to this system is the possibility that outside groups could tire of the current scale of spending. It is not clear that large donors are getting much for their dollar. All non-coordinated party and independent money is subject to

significantly higher costs for television advertising than candidates or coordinated party advertising. Outside money pours into races where there is already a lot of candidate money in play, driving up ad rates for everyone. There is a diminishing return on every dollar of advertising in terms of increases to candidate awareness and opinion shifts. Outside groups seem to spend a spectacular amount of money in a small number of races to move election results very little.

A more likely change is to the complexity of cooperation. Outside groups now have the ability to more easily produce advocacy spots, and may increasingly need to engage in advocacy if they are the dominant advertiser in a campaign. Single candidate groups are starting to become more common in Senate races. It's easy to imagine Senate races moving to an extreme division of labor similar to Carly Fiorina's 2016 presidential campaign structure where an independent single candidate group was responsible for all advertising and the candidate committee was only responsible for events and earned media (Corasaniti 2015). In this division of labor the independent group will have near complete control of the issue agenda and advertising tone instead of having a supporting role.

The various groups participating in elections faced a steep learning curve in 2010, but they adapted quickly. The parties and their candidates did not create the current system, but they quickly overcame signaling and communication challenges to create a cooperative system of campaigns that satisfies their objectives. Parties are adaptable and resilient entities, and they have found a way to return to prominence in the post-*Citizens United* era.

## Appendices



## Appendix A

### Measurement of Variables

#### Campaign Expenditures

An original dataset of campaign activity is necessary because readily available data on how campaign actors allocate their resources are rare. Two studies from the 1970's and 1980's examined how candidates allocate their resources (Goldenberg and Traugott 1984; Greenwood 1974), and journalists Sara Fritz and Dwight Morris gathered data on how candidates spend their resources in the 1990's (Fritz and Morris 1992; Morris and Gamache 1994). In the early 2000's Dwight Morris maintained the Campaign Finance Analysis Project, an online dataset of candidate expenditures through the 1990's and early 2000's, but the website and dataset no longer exist online. A recent study by Dowling and Miller (2014) examined the spending allocation of House candidates and independent groups in the 2012 election cycle.

The data of Senate campaign expenditures in 2010 to 2014 was created using FEC records of all expenditures by major party and viable independent Senate candidates (N=441,832) as well as all electioneering communications expenditures and expenditures by independent groups (N=124,670) in the 2010, 2012, and 2014 elections. The expenditures were categorized by the type of activity, allowing the media expenditures to be isolated from all other campaign activities.

Coding campaign expenditures by the type of activity, even with computer assistance, is a labor-intensive process. FEC forms provide activity codes for committees to use when reporting their expenditures, but committees almost never actually use them. Committees must write in descriptions of the expenditures, however. Campaign expenditures are coded using these brief descriptions.

The first step is to automatically code a large portion of the expenditures based on the appearance of certain character strings. The character strings for each category are as follows:

**Mass media** advertis, ads, spot, television, tv, video, radio, newspaper, media, broadcast, adwords

**Direct contact** field, printing, email, fundraising, direct, postage, database, canvass, list, gotv, data, telemarketing, blast

**Other** salary, payroll, office, rental, account, catering, taxes, equipment, administrative, reimbursement, void, shipping, travel, bank, refund, meal, event, meeting, mileage, wages, gas, hotel, lodging, air, rent, legal, insurance, copies, photo, survey, poll, research, taxi, vehicle, transportation, lease, fuel, transaction, food, computer, credit, parking, fee, ticket, donation, consult, utilities, event, deliver, beverage, blackberry, bonus, bookkeeping, maintenance, business, stickers, buttons, signs, banners, yard, t-shirts, breakfast, lunch, dinner, snacks, cell, cleaning, clerical, employ, tax, reception, storage, water, subscription

Some situations required more complex instructions or manual inspection by a human coder. Certain keywords such as “cable” and “phone” were always manually inspected. For example, “cable” in some cases refers to the office cable bill, and in other times is part of a description of a cable TV spot buy. “Phone” and “bank” appearing alone indicated *other* expenses, but “phone bank” was a *direct* expense. Any expenditure not coded based on character strings or tagged for multiple categories was inspected and coded by a human researcher.

The accuracy of the coding process was verified by manually recoding 1000 randomly selected expenditures. The manual recodes were identical in 99.8% of cases. Both errors were instances of *direct* expenditures incorrectly coded as *other*.

Coding media is a fairly easy process. Expenses related to mass media are well described and distinctive. Production costs are sometimes ambiguous and require looking up payees to determine if the production was of advertising or print materials. Mailings and invitations for fundraisers are considered *direct* but costs associated with fundraising events are considered *other*. Expenses related to managing lists were coded as *direct*, while more general tech expenses were coded as *other*. Sample ballots were also coded as *direct*, since these are usually mailed or left behind during canvassing. Per diem payments to field canvassers were considered a *direct* expense. Production of physical materials with a main purpose as leave-behinds in canvassing or as mailed items are coded as *direct*. Consulting, even when identified as specific for a task (e.g. GOTV consulting, media consulting) was coded under *other*.

Table A.1: Top Independent Groups, 2010 &amp; 2012

<b>Party-Adjacent, 2010</b>			<b>Issue-Based, 2010</b>	
	Crossroads GPS	35.48%	U.S. Chamber of Commerce	31.23%
	American Crossroads	23.08%	Club for Growth	5.92%
	American Action Network	19.66%	60 Plus	5.36%
	Patriot Majority PAC	7.39%	AFSCME	4.82%
	American Future Fund	5.79%	Americans for Tax Reform	4.65%
	Americans for Prosperity	5.10%	Ntl. Fed. of Ind. Business	3.34%
	Comm. Hope Growth & Opportunity	4.64%	Americans for Job Security	3.03%
	America's Family First Action Fund	3.54%	Women Vote	2.89%
	Commonsense Ten	2.29%	Citizens for Strength and Security	2.57%
	Republican Jewish Coalition	2.10%	National Education Association	2.49%
<b>Party-Adjacent, 2012</b>			<b>Issue-Based, 2012</b>	
	Crossroads GPS	33.32%	U.S. Chamber of Commerce	18.81%
	House Majority PAC	18.51%	AFSCME	9.11%
	Majority PAC	17.51%	Independence USA	8.04%
	Congressional Leadership Fund	8.06%	Now or Never PAC	6.69%
	American Crossroads	6.50%	Americans for Tax Reform	6.45%
	American Action Network	6.08%	Club for Growth	5.05%
	YG Action Fund	3.51%	SEIU	3.70%
	Patriot Majority PAC	2.90%	Center Forward	3.53%
	Freedom PAC	2.65%	American Future	2.85%
	Americans for Prosperity	1.67%	Freedomworks	2.55%

*Percentages indicate proportion of category's advertising volume by each group in that year*

## Outside Groups

Outside groups were coded based on the stated objectives of the group on its own website, profile information from open secrets.org, and press accounts if available. The largest groups by advertising volume in the 2010 and 2012 cycle are shown in Table A.1.

**Party Committees:** Groups explicitly connected with one of the two major parties.

**Party-Adjacent Groups:** Groups that refer to a broad platform of issues all consistent with one party, or refer to electing Republicans / conservatives or Democrats / progressives, and allocate resources across multiple races all on one partisan side.

**Issue-Based Groups:** Groups that are affiliated with an interest group or industry, offer memberships, or advocate for narrow policy goals. Tea Party groups are included in this category despite seemingly broad issue interests due to their tendency to oppose Republican incumbents in primaries and references to “true conservatives”. Most Tea Party expenditures are related to direct contact of voters via mail and post for fundraising and advocacy, and little has been spent on mass media.

**Single Candidate Groups:** Groups created to support a single candidate in a single election.

## Race Ratings

The Rothenberg & Gonzales Political Report rates the likelihood of each party winning the presidency, House, Senate, and gubernatorial contests using a nine-point scale, from safe Republican to safe Democrat (the distribution of race ratings are shown in Table A.2). In this project the ratings act as a summary measure of political professionals’ judgement of the level of risk and opportunity for each party in each contest. In the words of Nathan Gonzales, editor and publisher of the report, “We interview more than 150 congressional candidates every cycle and talk with key partisan decision-makers in Washington and astute political observers in the states. We also rely heavily on data, including past electoral history and trends, current polling (public and private, partisan and nonpartisan), as well as national surveys” (Gonzales 2015).

The scale is used to create two variables: the likelihood of losing and the competitiveness of the race. The nine point scale of the likelihood of electoral loss was created by flipping the scale for one party to create a nine-category rating of a candidate’s chances: 1 = safe, 2 = favored, 3 = lean toward, 4 = tilt toward, 5 = toss-up, 6 = tilt away, 7 = lean away, 8 = unlikely, 9 = hopeless. A five-point competitiveness scale is created by folding this scale: 1 = non-competitive, 2 = less competitive, 3 = competitive, 4 = tilting, 5 = toss-up.

A potential concern is that the race competitiveness variable is endogenous to the spending variables in the models in Chapter 3. Gonzales makes no mention of campaign spending when describing how ratings are determined, but campaign spending could be factored into the ratings through Rothenberg’s discussions with “key partisan decision-makers ... and astute political observers.” Surely, spending can affect competitiveness at the margins or else campaigns don’t matter and all

Table A.2: Competitiveness of Races

	Senate 2010–2014 (Chapter 3)	Senate 2010–2012 (Chapters 4 & 5)	House 2010–2012 (Chapters 4 & 5)
Safe	25%	21%	33%
Favored	8%	7%	7%
Leaning towards	5%	5%	6%
Tilting towards	6%	9%	6%
Toss Up	13%	15%	9%
Tilting away	6%	9%	5%
Leaning away	6%	7%	6%
Unlikely	8%	9%	6%
Hopeless	22%	18%	23%
N=	202	117	632

campaign spending is irrational. However, Linda McMahon’s \$25 million in media spending in Connecticut in 2010 couldn’t turn that race into one that was especially close, and race ratings did not clearly respond to her spending. In addition, there is little evidence that the Rothenberg staff update or alter race ratings based on suddenly announced large media buys or other campaign activity. Instead, polls, and past performances in the states are the strongest drivers of these ratings. For these reasons it is reasonable to treat the competitiveness ratings as exogenous to political spending.

### Advertisement Audience

Each airing of an advertisement was assigned a value to account for the size of the media market where the ad aired and the share of the market typically viewing during the daypart when the ad ran, where  $audience = market \times daypart$ . The resulting *audience* value can be thought of as the maximum potential audience for the airing. *Market* size is the total number of television households in the market in thousands, obtained from Nielson for the year of the election, 2010 and 2012. *Daypart* viewership was obtained from Nielson and represent the national average for each market viewing broadcast television during the daypart from July through December in each year.

## Attack Percentage

The attack percentage was measured for each airing using two variables provided in the WMP data. The WMP codes ads into three categories: *attack*, *contrast*, and *promote*, and further codes contrast ads for the mix of attacking and advocacy within each ad. A *negativity* score to measure the proportion of attack in each spot was created where attack ads were coded as 1, promote ads as 0, and contrast ads were coded as follows: “more promote than attack” = .25, “about equal attack and promote” = .50, “more attack than promote” = .75, “only contrasting element is brief statement in oral authorization” = 1. The resulting scale assigned one of five values to each airing: 0, .25, .50, .75, or 1. Multiplying the audience for each airing by its *negativity* score yields the total volume of attack advertising, where  $attackvol = negativity \times audience$ . The sum of a candidate’s attack volume divided by the the sum of the candidate’s total audience yields that candidate’s attack percentage.

## Supporting Attack Ratio

Supporting attack is the total volume of attack by outside groups in support of a candidate divided by that candidate’s own total advertising volume.

## Opposing Attack Ratio

Opposing attack is the volume of advertising attacking against a candidate by all campaign actors (the opposing candidate’s advertising plus opposing outside group advertising) divided by that candidate’s own total advertising volume.

## Personal Attack Percentage

Each attack ad airing was coded for *personal* attack according to the following: *personal only* = 1, *both personal and policy* = .5, and *policy only* = 0. The volume of personal attack for each actor is the sum for all airings of  $personalvol = personal \times attackvol$ . The volume of personal attack divided by the volume of all attack by each actor yields the personal attack percentage.

## Ownership and Salience Values

The values for issue ownership and salience were drawn from Egan (2013) and Franz, Fowler, and Ridout (2016), respectively. Ownership scores were rescaled for each party from 0 to 1, with the extreme values trimmed to .01 and .99 to prevent utility estimates of 0 for any issue. Salience values represent proportions of the electorate naming each issue as the most important in Gallup polls in the late summer and early fall of 2010 and 2012. values for all 18 issue categories are listed in Table A.3.

Table A.3: Issue Ownership and Salience Values

	Ownership		Salience	
	Rep.	Dem.	2010	2012
Economy	.537	.463	.263	.288
Jobs	.454	.546	.214	.225
Healthcare	.280	.720	.008	.009
Good Govt.	.613	.387	.088	.108
Foreign Affairs	.525	.475	.065	.013
Deficit	.603	.397	.053	.072
Immigration	.720	.280	.046	.027
Poverty	.335	.665	.031	.036
Education	.449	.551	.023	.027
Domestic Security	.990	.010	.015	.004
Taxes	.656	.344	.011	.009
Crime	.815	.185	.008	.004
Energy	.387	.612	.008	.009
Social Security	.366	.634	.008	.002
Environment	.010	.990	.008	.009
Military	.895	.104	.004	.002
Trade	.941	.059	.004	.002

*Source data for scores obtained from Egan (2013) and Franz, Fowler, and Ridout (2016)*

## Appendix B

### Additional Models and Robustness Checks

#### Testing the Validity of Pooled Samples

To increase the statistical power the data were pooled across years. However, this pooling may merge data with very different relationships at work. In particular, the 2010 election came up shortly after clarification from the FEC on independent expenditures, so a learning curve could be expected and coefficients estimated for 2010 may be quite different than the coefficients estimated for 2012 or 2014. To examine differences by year, the models from Chapters 3 and 4 are fully interacted with the year variable. The tables below provide the results from Wald tests to determine whether the coefficients are the same between election years (this is equivalent to a Chow test). In these tests, an F-test is performed to determine the probability that the coefficients are significantly different between election years in the tobit model, and a chi square test is performed for the fractional logit model.

In the tobit model of spending, there were differences between the coefficients by year for two spending variables (though the tests cannot estimate differences in  $\text{year} \times \text{race competitiveness}$ ). The relationship of interest, between candidate and outside spending, is different across election years (see Table B.1), thus an additional model is provided in the main text to estimate these slopes separately for each election year.

Table B.1: Test of Interactions: Model of Media Spending

	F	p-value
Year	0.86	.42
Candidate media $\times$ year	11.88	.00
Opposing media $\times$ year	3.75	.03
Incumbent $\times$ year	2.33	.10
Size of media markets $\times$ year	0.72	.49



In the pooled sample of attack advertising no significant differences are observed between any of the variables between 2010 and 2012 (Table B.2). The single difference is the main effect term for year in the House model, reflecting that there was a difference in the intercept for candidate attack percentage from 2010 to 2012, but the slopes were identical.

Table B.2: Test of Interactions: Models of Attack Advertising

	Senate		House	
	$\chi^2$	p-value	$\chi^2$	p-value
Year	1.23	.26	5.35	.02
Supporting attacks $\times$ year	1.35	.24	0.35	.55
Race rating $\times$ year	7.23	.51	7.72	.46
Opposing attacks $\times$ year	2.12	.15	0.65	.42
Inc., cha., open $\times$ year	0.79	.67	1.13	.57

## Assessing the Audience Measure

Most recent studies of campaign advertising content measure advertising volume as a count of airings. This approach ignores differences in the cost and the reach of airings occurring in different markets, at different times, and during different programming. It does necessarily pose a problem to leave these factors unaccounted for: differences in cost and reach may not be relevant to the analyses, the comparisons may involve sets of airings that occurred in sufficiently similar times and markets, or the differences may be random noise that cancel out in large samples. However, because the essential comparisons in this study are between candidates and independent groups who purchase advertising at different rates and might pursue different buying strategies, the additional step was taken to weight the advertising with a basic measure of the ads' placements. For example, if Super PACs tend to purchase larger numbers of spots in cheaper slots compared to candidates, then our assessment of the impact of Super PAC advertising using a simple count of airings would be biased.

Obtaining ratings estimates for each of the 2,382,138 airings included in this study is neither practical nor financially possible (precision ratings data, even several years old, are proprietary and are available only at significant cost). So a compromise must be struck between increased precision on one hand and feasibility and cost on the other. The information we would need to have the most precise estimate of the

total impressions of an advertisement, in order of increasing precision, are: first, the television market in which the ad aired; second, the part of the day when the ad aired; third, the station on which the ad aired; fourth and at the greatest level of precision, the program during which the ad aired. The approach taken in this project includes the first two in arriving at an audience estimate: the size of the market and the average broadcast television viewership during the daypart.

It is important to also note that the advertising under study here is limited to broadcast television. This reduces the variance in audience sizes within dayparts across stations within the dataset. For example, it would be inappropriate to treat a spot airing during the early news daypart on the Hallmark Channel the same as a spot airing at the same time on an ABC affiliate local news broadcast. This study only compares airings from broadcast stations that have a smaller variation in audience sizes at a given time compared to the wide range of audience sizes across cable networks.

While this measure improves the quality of comparisons of advertising strength, it should be noted what is still left out. This weighting scheme does not differentiate between broadcast television stations within a market, does not differentiate between programs within a daypart, and does not account for demographic differences in viewership of different television programs - all considerations of great importance to media buyers for campaign actors. Still, weighting airings by market and daypart is a significant improvement on the measurement of advertising volume in terms of reach compared to a count of ad airings, and there is no reason to expect that this weighting introduces more error than it eliminates.

### ***Where Groups Place Their Ads***

If candidates and outside groups have differences in the distribution of their airings across dayparts, this would be a immediate indication that their individual airings are reaching audiences of different sizes. A broad picture of the advertising placement patterns of outside groups compared to candidates is provided in Table B.3. In the aggregate, outside groups and candidates have very similar ad placement patterns in terms of dayparts.

The more important bias could occur in the values for supporting attacks in Chapter 4 since this variable is a quotient of supporting outside group advertising volume divided by candidate advertising volume. The differences between the supporting attacks calculated from audience-weighted airings minus the supporting

Table B.3: Portion of Airings by Daypart

	2010		2012	
	Candidates	Outsiders	Candidates	Outsiders
Early Morning	26.5%	28.2%	28.3%	24.9%
Daytime	19.9%	19.0%	16.9%	17.9%
Early Fringe	14.5%	13.8%	13.5%	13.4%
Early News	7.4%	7.5%	8.3%	8.7%
Prime Access	9.2%	9.3%	10.5%	11.5%
Prime Time	6.3%	5.8%	5.6%	6.4%
Late News	7.6%	7.4%	8.6%	8.5%
Late Fringe	8.6%	8.9%	8.3%	8.8%
N=	758,542	414,314	1,642,628	1,028,814

*General election advertising only, combines Senate and House campaigns*

attacks calculated from unweighted airings is quite small: the average difference in the values is just 0.03 (SD = 0.36).

In short, for analyses that include a large number of campaigns, these differences are smoothed out enough that we can be comfortable with airings as a unit of analysis. In analyses of a single campaign we should be wary of ad counts, but in studies of a larger scope, these minor errors should largely disappear as a concern. Despite the small differences, the weighted values are used in the analyses in this dissertation since the values better represent the total impressions of the advertising under study.

### ***Attack Percentage Model Using Unweighted Airings***

To ensure that the results reported in this study are robust to alternative measures of advertising strength, the regression models for candidate attack percentage in Chapter 4 are re-estimated using unweighted ad airings, and the results are given in Table B.4. In these models the candidate attack percentage, the supporting attack ratio, and opposing attacks are all calculated without the inclusion of a weight for the estimated audience, but the models are otherwise the same. The associations between outside group attacks and candidate attacks in these models are all still in the expected negative direction, the magnitude of the effects are very close to those in the models in the body of the dissertation, and the coefficients are statistically

significant. The coefficient for House races in the base model is slightly smaller, -.115 versus -.138, and is significant only in a one-tailed test, though the p-value in the two-tailed test ( $p = .056$ ) is very close to standard thresholds of statistical significance. The results from these additional models provide confidence that the results reported in the body of the paper are robust.

## Advertising Volume and Convergence

A potential driver of the improved convergence values in Chapter 5 moving from candidates to total campaigns is the greater advertising volume. Simply adding more advertising volume to a campaign may improve its fit with issue utility estimates. To investigate this possibility, I estimate a linear regression model where the dependent variable is the total campaign convergence score with issue utility estimates, multiplied by 100. Therefore, a 1 point effect by one of the independent variables indicates an independent effect of one percentage point of convergence, e.g., change in convergence score from .411 to .421. The independent variables are the number of issues raised by the campaign, the advertising volume of the candidate and the advertising volume of outside groups, the competitiveness of the contest as rated by the Rothenberg Political Report, whether it was a Democratic or Republican campaign and whether the campaign is for a Senate or House seat.

The volume of advertising by candidates and by outside groups had no association with the convergence scores of the advertising with issue utility scores. Several other variables did have a significant relationship with issue utilities, however. Republican candidates had utility scores 6.57 points higher than Democrats, and campaigns in 2012 had scores 3.45 points higher. The variable of potential concern is the count of issues. One additional issue in a campaign's advertising is associated with a 1.87 point higher convergence score.

Does this coefficient mean that any broadening of the issue agenda improves campaigns' convergence scores? Or that convergence scores peak for every campaign that raises 6 or 7 issues, no matter which issues they emphasize? The first possibility would be unsatisfactory because it implies that campaigns where outside groups or the candidate engage in overly broad messaging fare better on convergence. The second possibility would be unsatisfactory since it would indicate that the relationships shown in this study are merely a function of campaigns deviating from an ideal *count* instead of *selection* of issues. Fortunately, Figure B.1 illustrates the nature of this association. Campaigns with just 1 or 2 issues mentioned in their advertising

Table B.4: Candidate Attack Models with Unweighted Airings

Independent Variables	Base Model		Partisan Model	
	Senate	House	Senate	House
Supporting attacks	-.492* (.197)	-.115+ (.060)	-.819* (.306)	-.293*** (.081)
Republican	—	—	.374 (.307)	-.078 (.134)
Republican $\times$ supporting attacks	—	—	.278 (.280)	.252** (.091)
Nearly safe seat (2)	2.377*** (.615)	1.392*** (.216)	2.485*** (.645)	1.394*** (.216)
(3)	2.737*** (.538)	1.844*** (.255)	2.953*** (.535)	1.900*** (.255)
(4)	3.017*** (.533)	1.678*** (.222)	2.965*** (.555)	1.684*** (.227)
Toss Up (5)	2.837*** (.579)	1.783*** (.215)	2.970*** (.628)	1.844*** (.219)
(6)	2.951*** (.585)	1.845*** (.249)	3.217*** (.617)	1.953*** (.256)
(7)	2.396*** (.664)	2.103*** (.252)	2.130** (.655)	2.133*** (.262)
(8)	2.092*** (.534)	1.508*** (.252)	2.244*** (.556)	1.475*** (.254)
Hopeless candidacy (9)	1.985** (.613)	1.039*** (.217)	2.169** (.629)	1.017*** (.227)
Opposing attacks	.218* (.125)	.125** (.047)	.312** (.117)	.125** (.047)
Challenging candidate	.045 (.361)	.140 (.144)	-.359 (.405)	.152 (.154)
Open seat candidate	-.405 (.277)	-.254 (.175)	-.556 (.323)	-.244 (.176)
Three-way race	-1.298*** (.356)	—	—	—
2012	.225 (.220)	-.549*** (.110)	.281 (.227)	-.517*** (.110)
Intercept	-2.396*** (.470)	-1.417*** (.150)	-2.616*** (.482)	-1.383*** (.166)
N	119	632	115	632
BIC	-466.79	-3725.95	-438.93	-3714.93
Log Pseudo-Likelihood	-50.65	-291.22	-49.46	-290.28

*Standard errors in parentheses*<sup>+</sup> $p < .10$ , \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$ , two-tailed tests

Table B.5: OLS Model of Convergence

Independent Variables	Coefficient	p-value
Number of issues	1.87	(<.01)
Candidate ad volume	<0.01	(.44)
Outside ad volume	<0.01	(.47)
Race competitiveness	-0.93	(.05)
Democratic candidate	-6.57	(<.01)
House race	1.32	(.44)
2012	3.45	(<.01)
Intercept	23.50	(<.01)
N	733	
R <sup>2</sup>	.15	

yield very low convergence scores, but campaigns with a range of 3 through 15 issues all fare equally well on convergence with issue utility scores. Thus, one or two issue campaigns score poorly for convergence as they should, but campaigns with broader agendas all have similar distributions of convergence scores indicating that the count of issues does not determine convergence.

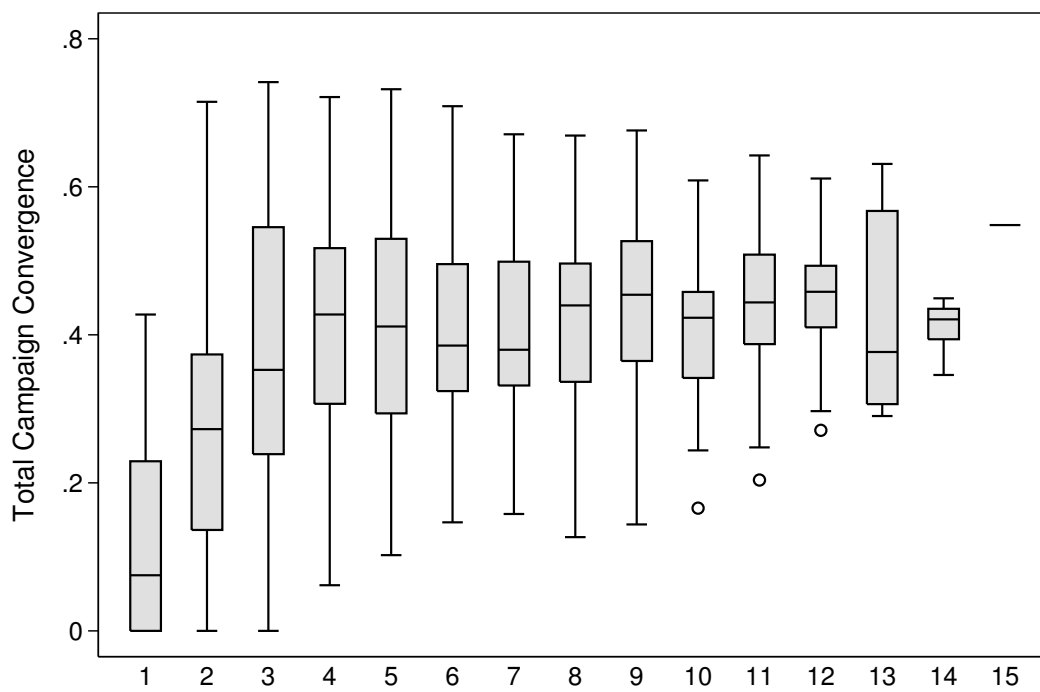


Figure B.1: Convergence by Number of Issues Raised in Campaign

## Bibliography

- Abbe, Owen G., Jay Goodliffe, Paul S. Herrnson, and Kelly D. Patterson. 2003. "Agenda Setting in Congressional Elections: The Impact of Issues and Campaigns on Voting Behavior." *Political Research Quarterly* 56 (4): 419–430.
- Abbe, Owen G., Paul S. Herrnson, David B. Magleby, and Kelly Peterson. 2001. "Are Professional Campaigns More Negative?" In *Playing Hardball: Campaigning for the U.S. Congress*, ed. Paul S. Herrnson. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Aldrich, John H. 1995. *Why Parties? The Origin and Transformation of Party Politics in America*. New York: Cambridge Univ Press.
- Allen, Mike, and Nancy Burrell. 2002. "The Negativity Effect in Political Advertising." In *The Persuasion Handbook: Developments in Theory and Practice*, ed. James Price Dillard and Michael Pfau. Sage Publications.
- Alvarez, R. Michael. 1997. *Information and Elections*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.
- Alvarez, R. Michael, and Charles H. Franklin. 1994. "Uncertainty and Political Perceptions." *Journal of Politics* 56 (3): 671–688.
- Ansolabehere, Stephen, and Alan Gerber. 1994. "The Mismeasure of Campaign Spending: Evidence from the 1990 US House Elections." *Journal of Politics* 56 (4): 1106–18.
- Ansolabehere, Stephen, and James M. Snyder. 2000. "Campaign War Chests in Congressional Elections." *Business and Politics* 2 (1): 9–33.
- Ansolabehere, Stephen, and Shanto Iyengar. 1994. "Riding the Wave and Claiming Ownership Over Issues: The Joint Effects of Advertising and News Coverage in Campaigns." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 58 (3): 335–357.
- Ansolabehere, Stephen, and Shanto Iyengar. 1995. *Going Negative: How Attack Ads Shrink and Polarize the Electorate*. New York: Free Press.



- Arbour, Brian K. 2013. "Candidate Reputations and Issue Agendas." *American Politics Research* 41 (6): 1022–1051.
- Baldassarri, Delia, and Andrew Gelman. 2008. "Partisans without Constraint: Political Polarization and Trends in American Public Opinion." *American Journal of Sociology* 114 (2): 408–446.
- Barber, Michael J., Brandice Canes-Wrone, and Sharece Thrower. 2017. "Ideologically Sophisticated Donors: Which Candidates Do Individual Contributors Finance?" *American Journal of Political Science* 61 (2): 271–288.
- Baumeister, Roy F., Ellen Bratslavsky, Catrin Finkenauer, and Kathleen D. Vohs. 2001. "Bad is Stronger Than Good." *Review of General Psychology* 5 (4): 323–370.
- Bawn, Kathleen, Martin Cohen, David Karol, Seth Masket, Hans Noel, and John Zaller. 2012. "A Theory of Political Parties: Groups, Policy Demands and Nominations in American Politics." *Perspectives on Politics* 10 (03): 571–597.
- Belanger, Eric, and Bonnie M. Meguid. 2008. "Issue Salience, Issue Ownership, and Issue-Based Vote Choice." *Electoral Studies* 27 (3): 477–491.
- Blumenthal, Paul. 2014. "Democrats Used Twitter Too, To Coordinate With Outside Groups." *Huffington Post* (November 20).
- Boatright, Robert G., Michael J. Malbin, Mark J. Rozell, and Clyde Wilcox. 2006. "Interest Groups and Advocacy Organizations After BCRA." In *The Election After Reform: Money, Politics, and the Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act*, ed. Michael J. Malbin. Rowman and Littlefield.
- Box-Steffensmeier, Janet M. 1996. "A Dynamic Analysis of The Role of War Chests in Campaign Strategy." *American Journal of Political Science* 40 (2): 352–371.
- Brians, Craig Leonard, and Martin P. Wattenberg. 1996. "Campaign Issue Knowledge and Salience: Comparing Reception from TV Commercials, TV News, and Newspapers." *American Journal of Political Science* 40 (1): 172–193.
- Brooks, Deborah J., and Michael Murov. 2012. "Assessing Accountability in a Post-Citizens United Era: The Effect of Attack Ad Sponsorship by Unknown Independent Groups." *American Politics Research* 40 (3): 383–418.

- Brox, Brian. 2013. *Back in the Game: Political Party Campaigning in an Era of Reform*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Budge, Ian, and Dennis J. Farlie. 1983. *Explaining and Predicting Elections: Issue Effects and Party Strategies in Twenty-Three Democracies*. Winchester, MA: Allen and Unwin.
- Cama, Timothy. 2015. "Greens Target Four GOP Senators in Major Ad Buy." *The Hill* (September 1).
- Campaign Finance Institute. 2014. "House and Senate Campaign Expenditures 1974–2014." <http://www.cfinst.org/data.aspx>. accessed July 6, 2015.
- Cantor, David M., and Paul S. Herrnson. 1997. "Party Campaign Activity and Party Unity in the U. S. House of Representatives." *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 22 (3): 393–415.
- Carsey, Thomas M. 2000. *Campaign Dynamics: The Race for Governor*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.
- Clark, Peter B., and James Q. Wilson. 1961. "Incentive Systems: A Theory of Organizations." *Administrative Science Quarterly* 6 (2): 129–166.
- Cogan, Brian, and Tony Kelso. 2009. *Encyclopedia of Politics, the Media, and Popular Culture*. Santa Barbara, CA: Greenwood Press.
- Confessore, Nicholas. 2011. "Outside Groups Eclipsing G.O.P. as Hub of Campaigns." *New York Times* (October 29).
- Confessore, Nicholas. 2014a. "Big-Money Donors Demand Larger Say in Campaign Strategy." *New York Times* (March 1).
- Confessore, Nicholas. 2014b. "Outside Groups With Deep Pockets Lift G.O.P." *New York Times* (November 5).
- Corasaniti, Nick. 2015. "Carly Fiorina's 'Super PAC' Aids Her Campaign, in Plain Sight." *New York Times* (September 30).
- Corrado, Anthony. 2014. "The Regulatory Environment of the 2012 Election." In *Financing the 2012 Election*, ed. David Magleby. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press.

- Damore, David F. 2002. "Candidate Strategy and the Decision to Go Negative." *Political Research Quarterly* 55 (3): 669–686.
- Damore, David F., and Thomas G. Hansford. 1999. "The Allocation of Party Controlled Campaign Resources in the House of Representatives, 1989-1996." *Political Research Quarterly* 52 (2): 371–385.
- Dowling, Conor M., and Amber Wichowsky. 2013. "Does It Matter Who's Behind the Curtain? Anonymity in Political Advertising and the Effects of Campaign Finance Disclosure." *American Politics Research* 41 (6): 965–996.
- Dowling, Conor M., and Amber Wichowsky. 2015. "Attacks Without Consequence? Candidates, Parties, Groups, and the Changing Face of Negative Advertising." *American Journal of Political Science* 59 (1): 19–36.
- Dowling, Conor M., and Michael G. Miller. 2014. *Super PAC! Money, Elections, and Voters after Citizens United*. New York: Routledge.
- Downs, Anthony. 1957. *An Economic Theory of Democracy*. New York, NY: Harper & Row.
- Dwyre, Diana. 2013. "Political Parties and Campaign Finance: Challenges and Adaptations." In *The Parties Respond: Changes in American Parties and Campaigns*, ed. Sandy L. Brewer, Mark D. Maisel. 5th ed. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Dwyre, Diana, and Evelyn Braz. 2015. "Super PAC Spending Strategies and Goals." *The Forum* 13 (2): 245–267.
- Dwyre, Diana, and Robin Kolodny. 2014. "Political Party Activity in the 2014 Elections: Sophisticated Orchestration or Diminished Influence?" In *The State of the Parties*, ed. John C. Green, Daniel J. Coffey, and David B. Cohen. 7th ed. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield.
- Egan, Patrick J. 2013. *Partisan Priorities: How Issue Ownership Drives and Distorts American Politics*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Farnam, T.W. 2012. "FCC to Require More Disclosure About Political Ads." *Washington Post* (April 27).
- Farrar-Myers, Victoria A., and Richard M. Skinner. 2012. "Super PACs and the 2012 Elections." *The Forum* 10 (4): 105–118.

- Federal Election Commission. 2015. "Contribution Limits for 2015–2016 Federal Elections." <http://www.fec.gov/info/contriblimitschart1516.pdf>. accessed October 25, 2015.
- Fowler, Erika Franklin, Michael Franz, and Travis N. Ridout. 2015. "Political Advertising in 2012." Version 1.0. Middletown, CT.
- Fowler, Erika Franklin, Michael M. Franz, and Travis N. Ridout. 2014. "Political Advertising in 2010." Version 1.1. Middletown, CT.
- Fowler, Erika Franklin, and Travis N. Ridout. 2012. "Negative, Angry, and Ubiquitous: Political Advertising in 2012." *The Forum* 10 (4): 51–61.
- Fowler, Erika Franklin, and Travis N. Ridout. 2014. "Political Advertising in 2014: The Year of the Outside Group." *The Forum* 12 (4): 663–684.
- Francia, Peter L., John C. Green, Paul S. Herrnson, Lynda W. Powell, and Clyde Wilcox. 2003. *The Financiers of Congressional Elections*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Franklin, Charles H. 1991. "Eschewing Obfuscation? Campaigns and the Perception of U.S. Senate Incumbents." *American Political Science Review* 85 (4): 1193–1214.
- Franz, Michael M. 2011. "What Motivates Interest Groups to Participate?" In *Guide to Interest Groups and Lobbying in the United States*, ed. Burdett A. Loomis, Dara S. Strolovitch, and Peter L. Francia. Washington, DC: CQ Press.
- Franz, Michael M. 2013. "Campaign Finance Law: The Changing Role of Parties and Interest Groups." In *Law and Election Politics: The Rules of the Game*, ed. Matthew J. Streb. 2nd ed. New York: Routledge.
- Franz, Michael M. 2014. "Interest Group Issue Appeals: Evidence of Issue Convergence in Senate and Presidential Elections, 2008 – 2014." *The Forum* 12 (4): 685–712.
- Franz, Michael M., Erika Franklin Fowler, and Travis N. Ridout. 2016. "Loose Canons or Loyal Foot Soldiers? Toward a More Complex Theory of Interest Group Advertising Strategies." *American Journal of Political Science* 60 (3): 738–751.

- Franz, Michael M., Joel Rivlin, and Kenneth Goldstein. 2006. "Much More of the Same: Advertising Pre- and Post-BCRA." In *The Election After Reform: Money, Politics, and the Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act*, ed. Michael J. Malbin. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield.
- Freedman, Paul B., and Kenneth M. Goldstein. 1999. "Measuring Media Exposure and the Effects of Negative Campaign Ads." *American Journal of Political Science* 43 (4): 189–208.
- Freedman, Paul, Michael Franz, and Kenneth Goldstein. 2004. "Campaign Advertising and Democratic Citizenship." *American Journal of Political Science* 48 (4): 723–741.
- Fridkin, Kim L., and Patrick Kenney. 2011. "Variability in Citizens' Reactions to Different Types of Negative Campaigns." *American Journal of Political Science* 55 (2): 307–325.
- Fritz, Sara, and Dwight Morris. 1992. *Handbook of Campaign Spending*. Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly Press.
- Garramone, Gina M. 1985. "Effects of Negative Political Advertising: The Roles of Sponsor and Rebuttal." *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media* 29 (2): 147–159.
- Garramone, Gina M., and Sandra J. Smith. 1984. "Reactions to Political Advertising: Clarifying Sponsor Effects." *Journalism Quarterly* 61 (4): 771–775.
- Geer, John G. 2006. *In Defense of Negativity: Attack Ads in Presidential Elections*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Gerber, Alan S., James G. Gimpel, Donald P. Green, and Daron R. Shaw. 2011. "How Large and Long-Lasting Are the Persuasive Effects of Televised Campaign Ads? Results from a Randomized Field Experiment." *American Political Science Review* 105 (1): 135–150.
- Gerken, Heather K. 2014. "Boden Lecture: The Real Problem With Citizens United: Campaign Finance, Dark Money, and Shadow Parties." *Marquette Law Review* 97 (4): 903–923.
- Goidel, Robert K., and Donald A. Gross. 1994. "A Systems Approach to Campaign Finance in U.S. House Elections." *American Politics Quarterly* 22: 125–153.

- Goldenberg, Edie N., and Michael W. Traugott. 1984. *Campaigning for Congress*. Congressional Quarterly Press.
- Goldstein, Ken, and Paul Freedman. 2000. "New Evidence for New Arguments: Money and Advertising in the 1996 Senate Elections." *The Journal of Politics* 62 (04): 1087–1108.
- Goldstein, Ken, and Paul Freedman. 2002. "Campaign Advertising and Voter Turnout: New Evidence for a Stimulation Effect." *The Journal of Politics* 64 (03): 721–740.
- Goldstein, Kenneth M., Jonathan S. Krasno, Lee Bradford, and Daniel E. Seltz. 2001. "Going Negative: Attack Advertising in the 1998 Elections." In *Playing Hardball: Campaigning for the U.S. Congress*, ed. Paul S. Herrnson. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Goldstein, Kenneth, Michael M. Franz, and Travis N. Ridout. 2002. *Political Advertising in 2000 combined file codebook*. The Department of Political Science at The University of Wisconsin-Madison and The Breenan Center for Justice at New York University.
- Gonzales, Nathan L. 2015. "What Happened to The Rothenberg Political Report?" *Roll Call* (January 12).
- Goodliffe, Jay. 2001. "The Effect of War Chests on Challenger Entry in U.S. House Elections." *American Journal of Political Science* 45 (4): 830–844.
- Green, Jane, and Sara B. Hobolt. 2008. "Owning the Issue Agenda: Party Strategies and Vote Choices in British Elections." *Electoral Studies* 27 (3): 460–476.
- Greenwood, John C. 1974. *Legislative Candidates and Campaign Spending in California*. Davis, CA: Institute of Government Affairs, University of California.
- Hansen, Kasper M., and Rasmus Tue Pedersen. 2008. "Negative Campaigning in a Multiparty System." *Scandinavian Political Studies* 31 (12): 408–427.
- Haynes, Audrey A., and Staci L. Rhine. 1998. "Attack Politics in Presidential Nomination Campaigns: An Examination of the Frequency and Determinants of Intermediated Negative Messages Against Opponents." *Political Research Quarterly* 51 (3): 691–721.

- Heberlig, Eric S., and Bruce A. Larson. 2005. "Redistributing Campaign Funds by U.S. House Members: The Spiraling Costs of the Permanent Campaign." *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 30 (4): 597-624.
- Herrnson, Paul, Kelly Patterson, and Stephanie Perry Curtis. 2014. "Financing the 2012 Congressional Elections." In *Financing the 2012 Election*, ed. David Magleby. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press.
- Herrnson, Paul S. 2009. "The Roles of Party Organizations, Party-Connected Committees, and Party Allies in Elections." *The Journal of Politics* 71 (4): 1207-1224.
- Hersch, Philip L., and Gerald S. McDougall. 1994. "Campaign War Chests as a Barrier to Entry in Congressional Races." *Economic Inquiry* 32: 630-641.
- Hetherington, Marc J. 2009. "Review Article: Putting Polarization in Perspective." *British Journal of Political Science* 39 (4): 413.
- Issacharoff, Samuel, and Jeremy Peterman. 2013. "Special Interests After Citizens United: Access, Replacement, and Interest Group Response to Legal Change." *Annual Review of Law and Social Science* 9: 185-205.
- Issacharoff, Samuel, and Pamela Karlan. 1998. "The Hydraulics of Campaign Finance Reform." *Texas Law Review* 77: 1705-1738.
- Issenberg, Sasha. 2015. "Mike Murphy: Rubio's Campaign 'Cynical,' Kasich's Plays Close to the Line." *Bloomberg.com* (October 21).
- Jacobson, Gary C. 1985. "Party Organization and Distribution of Campaign Resources: Republicans and Democrats in 1982." *Political Science Quarterly* 100 (4): 603-625.
- Jacobson, Gary C. 2010. "A Collective Dilemma Solved: The Distribution of Party Campaign Resources in the 2006 and 2008 Congressional Elections." *Election Law Journal* 9 (4): 381-397.
- Jamieson, Kathleen Hall, Paul Waldman, and Susan Sherr. 2000. "Eliminate the Negative? Categories of Analysis for Political Advertisements." In *Crowded Airwaves: Campaign Advertising in Elections*, ed. James A. Thurber, Candice J. Nelson, and David A. Dulio. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press.

- Jasperson, Amy E., and David P. Fan. 2002. "An Aggregate Examination of the Backlash Effect in Political Advertising: The Case of the 1996 U.S. Senate Race in Minnesota." *Journal of Advertising* 31 (1): 1-12.
- Jensen, Michael C., and William H. Meckling. 1976. "Theory of the Firm: Managerial Behavior, Agency Costs, and Ownership Structure." *Journal of Financial Economics* 3 (4): 305-360.
- Kahn, Kim, and Patrick J. Kenney. 1999. *The Spectacle of U.S. Senate Campaigns*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Kaplan, Noah, David K. Park, and Travis N. Ridout. 2006. "Dialogue in American Political Campaigns." *American Journal of Political Science* 50 (3): 724-736.
- Kern, Montague. 1989. *30-Second Politics: Political Advertising in the 1980s*. New York: Praeger Press.
- Key, V. O. 1964. *Politics, Parties, and Pressure Groups*. New York: Cromwell.
- Koger, Gregory, Seth Masket, and Hans Noel. 2009. "Partisan Webs: Information Exchange and Party Networks." *British Journal of Political Science* 39: 633-653.
- Kolodny, Robin. 1998. *Pursuing Majorities: Congressional Campaign Committees in American Politics*. Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press.
- Kolodny, Robin, and Diana Dwyre. 1998. "Party-Orchestrated Activities for Legislative Party Goals: Campaigns for Majorities in the US House of Representatives in the 1990s." *Party Politics* 4 (3): 275-295.
- La Raja, Raymond J. 2008. *Small Change: Money, Political Parties, and Campaign Finance Reform*. University of Michigan Press.
- La Raja, Raymond J. 2012. "Why Super PAC's: How the American Party System Outgrew the Campaign Finance System." *The Forum* 10 (4): 91-104.
- La Raja, Raymond J., and Brian Schaffner. 2014. "Want to Reduce Polarization? Give More Money to the Parties." <https://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/monkey-cage/wp/2014/07/21/want-to-reduce-polarization-give-parties-more-money/>. accessed October 18, 2015.
- Lau, Richard R. 1985. "Two Explanations for Negativity Effects in Political Behavior." *American Journal of Political Science* 29 (1): 119-138.



- Lau, Richard R., and Gerald M. Pomper. 2004. *Negative Campaigning: An Analysis of US Senate Elections*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield.
- Lau, Richard R., Lee Sigelman, and Ivy Brown Rovner. 2007. "The Effects of Negative Political Campaigns: A Meta-Analytic Reassessment." *Journal of Politics* 69 (4): 1176–1209.
- Levendusky, Matthew. 2009. *The Partisan Sort: How Liberals Became Democrats and Conservatives Became Republicans*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Lichtblau, Eric. 2015. "F.E.C. Can't Curb Election Abuse, Commission Chief Says." *New York Times* (May 2).
- Long, J. Scott. 1997. *Regression Models for Categorical and Limited Dependent Variables*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Magleby, David B. 2011. "Electoral Politics as Team Sport: Advantage to the Democrats." In *State of the Parties*, ed. John C. Green and Daniel J. Coffey. 6th ed. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield.
- Magleby, David B. 2014a. "The 2012 Election as a Team Sport." In *Financing the 2012 Election*, ed. David B. Magleby. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press.
- Magleby, David B. 2014b. "Classifying Super PACs." In *State of the Parties*, ed. John C. Green, Daniel J. Coffey, and David B. Cohen. 7th ed. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield.
- Magleby, David B., J. Quin Monson, and Kelly D. Patterson, eds. 2007. *Dancing Without Partners: How Candidates, Parties, and Interest Groups Interact in the Presidential Campaign*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield.
- Magleby, David B., and Jay Goodliffe. 2014. "Interest Groups." In *Financing the 2012 Election*, ed. David B. Magleby. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press.
- Maisel, Sandy L., and Mark D. Brewer. 2010. *Parties and Elections in America: The Electoral Process*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield.
- Mattes, Kyle, and David P. Redlawsk. 2014. *The Positive Case for Negative Campaigning*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

- Mattingly, Phil. 2014. "The Super PAC Workaround: How Candidates Quietly, Legally Communicate." *Bloomberg Businessweek* (August 28).
- Mayhew, David R. 1974. *Congress: The Electoral Connection*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Memmott, Mark. 2010. "Cookie-Cutter Ads Dominate, Coast-to-Coast." *NPR.org* (October 20).
- Moody, Chris. 2014. "How the GOP Used Twitter to Stretch Election Laws." *CNN.com* (November 17).
- Morris, Dwight, and Murielle E. Gamache. 1994. *Handbook of Campaign Spending: Money in the 1992 Congressional Races*. Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly Press.
- Newport, Frank. 2010. "Obama Retains More Trust Than Congress on Healthcare." <http://www.gallup.com/poll/126338/obama-retains-trust-congress-healthcare.aspx>.
- Nokken, Timothy P. 2003. "Ideological Congruence Versus Electoral Success: Distribution of Party Organization Contributions in Senate Elections, 1990-2000." *American Politics Research* 31 (1): 3-26.
- Papke, Leslie E., and Jeffrey M. Wooldridge. 1996. "Econometric Methods for Fractional Response Variables with an Application to 401(k) Plan Participation Rates." *Journal of Applied Econometrics* 11: 619-632.
- Parker, Ashley. 2014. "Outside Money Drives a Deluge of Political Ads." *New York Times* (July 27).
- Patterson, Thomas E., and Robert D. McClure. 1976. *The Unseeing Eye: The Myth of Television Power in National Politics*. New York: Putnam.
- Petrocik, John R. 1996. "Issue Ownership in Presidential Elections, with a 1980 Case Study." *American Journal of Political Science* 40 (3): 825-850.
- Ridout, Travis N., and Michael M. Franz. 2011. *The Persuasive Power of Campaign Advertising*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.

- Riker, William. 1983. "Political Theory: The Art of Heresthetics." In *Political Science: The State of the Discipline*, ed. Ada Finifter. American Political Science Association.
- Roarty, Alex. 2012. "How Outside Groups Can Torpedo Campaigns They Support." *The Atlantic* (May 12).
- Schlesinger, Joseph A. 1985. "The New American Political Party." *American Political Science Review* 79: 1152–1169.
- Schwarz, Mildred A. 1990. *The Party Network: The Robust Organization of Illinois Republicans*. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press.
- Shaw, Daron R. 1999. "The Effect of TV Ads and Candidate Appearances on Statewide Presidential Votes, 1988-96." *American Political Science Review* 93 (2): 345–361.
- Shea, Daniel M., and Michael John Burton. 2006. *Campaign Craft: The Strategies, Tactics, and Art of Political Campaign Management*. 3rd ed. Westport, CT: Praeger Press.
- Sides, John. 2006. "The Origins of Campaign Agendas." *British Journal of Political Science* 36: 407–436.
- Sides, John. 2007. "The Consequences of Campaign Agendas." *American Politics Research* 35 (4): 465–488.
- Sigelman, Lee, and Emmett H. Buell. 2004. "Avoidance or Engagement? Issue Convergence in U.S. Presidential Campaigns, 1996–2000." *American Journal of Political Science* 48 (4): 650–661.
- Skinner, Richard M. 2005. "Do 527's Add Up to a Party? Thinking About the 'Shadows' of Politics." *The Forum* 3 (3).
- Skinner, Richard M. 2007. *More Than Money: Interest Group Action in Congressional Elections*. Rowman and Littlefield.
- Skinner, Richard M., Seth E. Masket, and David A. Dulio. 2012. "527 Committees and the Political Party Network." *American Politics Research* 40 (1): 60–84.
- Snyder, James M. 1989. "Election Goals and the Allocation of Campaign Resources." *Econometrica* 57 (3): 637–660.

- Sorauf, Frank. 1992. *Inside Campaign Finance: Myth and Realities*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Sulkin, Tracy. 2011. *The Legislative Legacy of Congressional Campaigns*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Sullivan, Sean. 2014. "Super PACs and Campaigns Can't Talk to Each Other. Here's How They Get Around It." *Washington Post* (April 24).
- Theilmann, John, and Allen Wilhite. 1998. "Campaign Tactics and the Decision to Attack." *Journal of Politics* 60 (4): 1050–1062.
- Tinkham, Spencer F., and Ruth Ann Weaver-Lariscy. 1995. "Incumbency and its Perceived Advantage: A Comparison of 1982 and 1990 Congressional Advertising Strategies." *Political Communication* 12 (3): 291–304.
- Tokaji, Daniel P., and Renata E. B. Strause. 2014. "The New Soft Money." Mortiz College of Law: Ohio State University.
- Verba, Sydney, Kay Lehman Schlozman, and Henry E. Brady. 1995. *Voice and Equality: Civic Volunteerism in American Politics*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Walter, Annemarie. 2014. "Choosing the Enemy: Attack Behavior in a Multiparty System." *Party Politics* 20 (3): 311–323.
- Wattenberg, Martin P. 1991. *The Rise of Candidate-Centered Politics: Presidential Elections in the 1980's*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Wattenberg, Martin P., and Craig Leonard Brians. 1999. "Negative Campaign Advertising: Demobilizer or Mobilizer?" *American Political Science Review* 93 (4): 891–899.
- Weber, Christopher, Johanna Dunaway, and Tyler Johnson. 2012. "Its All in the Name: Source Cue Ambiguity and the Persuasive Appeal of Campaign Ads." *Political Behavior* 34 (9): 561–584.
- Weissman, Steve, and Ruth Hassan. 2006. "BCRA and the 527 Groups." In *The Election After Reform: Money, Politics, and the Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act*, ed. Michael J. Malbin. Rowman and Littlefield.

Wooldridge, Jeffrey M. 2003. *Introductory Econometrics: A Modern Approach*. 2nd ed. Mason, OH: Thomson Southwestern.

Zhao, Xinshu, and Stephen H. Chaffee. 1995. "Campaign Advertisements Versus Television News as Sources of Political Issue Information." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 59 (1): 41–65.

## Vita

Kenneth Merrill Miller attended Ohio University from 1992 to 1995 but left to pursue a musical career. He played in two bands that released 14 albums, played in 28 U.S. states, and toured Europe 7 times. In that time he also worked in advertising and consumer market research. He later completed his Bachelor of Arts degree in political science at Cleveland State University in 2008 and received a Master of Applied Politics degree from the Ray C. Bliss Institute of Applied Politics at the University of Akron in 2010. While earning his M.A.P. degree he worked on public opinion projects for U.S. Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, Sen. Barbara Boxer, Rep. John Barrow, and Rep. Shelley Berkley. After briefly working in polling and campaign consulting in Ohio, he began graduate studies at The University of Texas at Austin in 2011.

Address: kenmiller4@gmail.com

This dissertation was typeset with L<sup>A</sup>T<sub>E</sub>X<sup>†</sup> by the author.

---

<sup>†</sup>L<sup>A</sup>T<sub>E</sub>X is a document preparation system developed by Leslie Lamport as a special version of Donald Knuth's T<sub>E</sub>X Program.